



# Horticulture Newsletter

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**KANSAS STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and  
Natural Resources

## Video of the Week:



Successful and efficient watering is key to a healthy garden. Whether hand watering, using sprinklers, or watering with drip irrigation, there are many ways to improve our watering practices. [This week's video provides tips for how to apply water to your garden most successfully](https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/watering-your-garden-tips-for-success), including important reminders to keep your garden looking its best: <https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/watering-your-garden-tips-for-success>

## Garden Calendar:

- Plant tomato, pepper, and eggplant transplants in the garden.
- Do not remove foliage from spring bulbs until it dies down naturally. This develops stronger blooms for next year.
- Continue to plant and divide perennials.
- Apply a slow-release nitrogen fertilizer to Tall Fescue and Kentucky bluegrass lawns to promote summer growth if the lawn is watered during the summer months. Lower maintenance and unirrigated lawns should skip this application.
- Prune spring flowering shrubs after blooming is complete. This helps to shape the plant and encourage more flowers next year.
- Harden off houseplants as you move plants outdoors for summer. Gradually increase the exposure to sunlight, wind, and temperature.

## Vegetables:

### **Monitor Vegetables For Colorado Potato Beetle Activity:**

The Colorado potato beetle is a destructive insect pest of many vegetable plants in the nightshade (*Solanaceae*) family, especially potato, eggplant, pepper, and tomato. Both adults and larvae feed on plant leaves and can cause severe plant damage if populations are not managed. Adult beetles are oval-shaped



(3/8 inch long), creamy-yellow to orange in color, and easily recognized by ten black stripes that extend lengthwise down their backs on their wing covers. They overwinter in the soil and emerge in May, feeding on plants before females lay clusters of bright yellow-orange eggs on the undersides of leaves.



Larvae hatch within three to ten days and feed aggressively on foliage, passing through four growth stages. The first- and second-instar larvae are humpbacked (less than 1/2 inch long), with a dark red color and black heads. Third- and fourth-instar larvae grow to 1/2 inch long and are pink to salmon in color with black heads. All larvae stages have two rows of black spots on both sides of the body. The older larvae are responsible for most of the damage and can cause extensive defoliation and plant stunting. Potatoes and other *Solanaceae* crops can tolerate some leaf damage, but heavy feeding may reduce overall crop yields.

Management relies on regular scouting (at least once per week) and cultural practices such as crop rotation, mulching, and removal of nearby weeds that may serve as an alternative food source. Hand removal of larvae and adults reduces Colorado potato beetle populations, as well as picking leaves with yellow-orange clusters of eggs on the undersides of leaves.

Insecticide applications can also be effective in control, however Colorado potato beetles can become resistant to chemical insecticides. Alternate between insecticides with different modes of action frequently for the first- and second-generation larvae. When the larvae are small (less than 1/4 inch) two strains of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *san diego* and *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *tenebrionis*) can be effective. Pyrethrin based products and products that contain the active ingredient spinosad can also be effective. Thorough coverage of the upper and lower surfaces of plant leaves is essential during application.

Visit our [Colorado Potato Beetle - Insect Pest of Vegetable Crops publication](#) for more information:

[https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/colorado-potato-beetle-insect-pest-of-vegetable-crops\\_MF3541](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/colorado-potato-beetle-insect-pest-of-vegetable-crops_MF3541)

### **Harvesting Leafy Greens:**

Leafy greens, such as lettuce, spinach, or kale, should generally be harvested when leaves are small to mid-sized and tender. If leaves are allowed to grow too large, greens can become bitter. Head forming greens, such as some lettuce or cabbage, should develop firm heads before harvesting.

Harvest lettuce and most leafy greens before flower spikes form (bolting). The best time of the day to harvest leafy greens is in the morning when temperatures are cool and plants are well hydrated.



For spring planted greens, harvest before the heat of summer sets in, making leaves bitter. For fall planted greens, harvest before freezes kill plants.

When harvesting leafy greens, there are several acceptable methods to collecting greens:

- **Harvest Individual Leaves:** Start with the largest leaves on the plant, usually those at the bottom, outer portion of the plant. This prevents leaves from growing too large and becoming old, tough, or bitter. This also encourages new leaves to develop from the upper center of the plant. Leaves can be snapped off with your fingers, a sharp knife, or pruning shears.
- **Harvest Greens En Masse Or By The Row:** With mass plantings or a row of greens, place a handful of greens from above the crown of the plant in your hand, and use a knife to cut off the leaves. This will harvest both large and small leaves. By leaving the stem or crown of the plant, new leaves will continue to develop, but additional time between harvests will be required since smaller leaves will also have been removed.
- **Harvest The Entire Plant:** Take a sharp knife and cut at the base of the plant, just above the roots and soil surface. This harvests the entire plant. This method may be preferred when harvesting greens that grow in heads, such as some lettuce or cabbage, or when crops are being rotated out to make room for the next vegetable crop.



Always keep food safety in mind when harvesting vegetables. Before harvesting, wash your hands thoroughly. Clean and sanitize any tools or containers to be used. Consider bringing a clean bowl and shears from your kitchen to harvest your produce, rather than buckets and tools used for weeding, watering, pruning, or other gardening practices. Any produce that has been either fed upon by an animal or exposed to wildlife/pet feces should be discarded. Washing animal feces off the produce does not guarantee that pathogens are removed from the vegetable. Be sure no insects are present.

Always wash leafy greens thoroughly with cool running tap water before consuming or storing. The temperature of the water used to wash produce is also critical to food safety. When leafy greens are harvested they are warm, and the crop needs to be cooled quickly to maintain quality and food safety. Never use water greater than 10°F colder than the recently harvested produce, as this helps prevent contaminants from infiltrating into the greens. Use several washings using water that starts out slightly cooler than the produce and progressively becomes colder. Wash leaves by spraying with fresh, clean water and draining off water quickly, rather than submerged in a water bath. Shake off excess moisture before storage or use. Remove excess water with paper towels or with a salad spinner. Most leafy greens will store best in cool temperatures, between 32°F and 36°F, and with humidity levels that are very high (90 to 98%). This helps to maintain crispness and prevent water loss.

## Fruit:

### **Thinning Excess Fruit From Fruit Trees:**

A fruit tree loaded with fruit may sound like a gardener's dream, but that abundance can create problems if left unmanaged:

1. When trees carry too many fruit, the fruit size is usually diminished. Trees can only provide limited water and energy for fruit production, so overcrowding means those resources are divided into many smaller fruits.
2. The weight of excess fruit can also damage branches. As fruits mature, their weight grows, placing additional strain on tree limbs. Strong winds and excess weight can spell disaster for the tree, as entire branches can break under the weight of mature fruit.
3. Excess fruit can also have long-term impacts on the tree. As trees spend energy maturing fruit over the summer months, trees often divert energy away from developing fruit buds for the following year's harvest. This often leads to a disappointing or nonexistent crop the following season, especially in apples.

Thinning excess fruit is the solution to all three of these issues. By thinning fruit trees now, you can reduce stress on branches, protect tree structure, and set the stage for healthier trees and better harvests both this year and next. Not all fruit trees require thinning - cherries for example do not benefit from fruit pruning. Most fruit trees do benefit from thinning, however, including apples, pears, peaches, plums, prunes, and apricots.

For best results, begin thinning when fruit reaches the size of a nickel. Thinning can be done removing fruit with pruners, or by pinching off fruit with your fingers. The amount of thinning varies by type of fruit:

- Apples & Pears: Usually fruit form in clusters of five – leave the largest, healthiest fruit of each cluster. Leave 6 to 8 inches between fruit.
- Peaches: Space fruit 6 to 8 inches apart.
- Plums & Prunes: Space fruit 4 to 5 inches apart.
- Apricots: Space fruit 2 to 4 inches apart.

Each of these recommendations are averages, and fruit may not align exactly to these distances. Some fruit may be closer, but overall thinning of the tree will promote a larger, sweeter fruit crop.

Remember, many areas of Kansas also experienced late spring freezes this year that may have damaged fruit crops. Late spring freezes are a form of natural flower/fruit thinning. In trees impacted by spring freezes, additional thinning may not be necessary.



## Flowers:

### **Pinch Back Mums And Other Perennials For Fuller, Healthier Plants:**

Many garden perennials benefit from a simple technique called pinching or heading back. Pinching is the removal of the primary growing point of the stem, resulting in the development of multiple side shoots. This helps develop plants that are shorter, denser, and have a fuller appearance, while also creating a greater number of flowers. Instead of one tall, leggy shoot that

produces a single bloom, multiple shorter side branches develop, each producing one or more flowers. A plant that has been pinched often is also less likely to flop over in the garden.

While Chrysanthemums or garden mums are the plant that most people think to pinch back, many perennials respond well to pinching, including:

- Artemisia (Wormwood)
- Achillea (Yarrow)
- Eupatorium (Blue Mist Flower)
- Eutrochium (Joe Pye Weed)
- Monarda (Beebalm)
- Nepeta (Catmint)
- Perovskia (Russian Sage)
- Platycodon (Balloon Flower)
- Sedum (Autumn Joy Sedum)
- Solidago (Goldenrod)
- Symphyotrichum (Asters)



Pinching can be done by squeezing off plant stems between your thumbnail and forefinger, by using pruners to make individual snips, or by using hedge shears to prune larger plantings all at once.

The first pinching is usually done in early spring when perennials reach six inches in height. Remove the top one inch of growth. A second pinching should be done when four inches of new growth form from the previous pinch. At that time, cut the new growth down by about half. The last pinch should take place before July 4<sup>th</sup>, in order to allow adequate time for flower development. One to three pinches can be accomplished most years in Kansas. When pinching, never remove more than one-third of the overall height of the plant at one time.

Pinching can make a significant difference in the performance of your perennial plants. Expect stronger plants that stand up better to wind and rain, a neater garden appearance, and a multiplied number of blooms when flowering season arrives.

## **Turf:**

### **Establishing A Buffalograss Lawn:**

Buffalograss has become increasingly popular in recent years due to its reputation as a low maintenance turfgrass. It requires less water, fertilizer, and mowing than other turfgrasses, and has excellent heat and drought tolerance. If you are interested in making the switch, May and June are ideal months to establish buffalograss.

Before making the switch, it is important to ensure Buffalograss is the right fit. Buffalograss is a warm-season grass, meaning it greens up later in the spring than Tall Fescue and goes dormant after the first frost each fall. Buffalograss also has a more blue-green leaf color, different than the dark-green color some people prefer. Buffalograss is native to Kansas, however, so it has excellent heat, drought, and cold tolerance. Buffalograss requires full sun (at least 6-8 hours each day) and will not grow well in dense shade. It also tolerates poor soil conditions, and has very few insect or disease problems. Weeds can be a problem, however.

If Buffalograss is right for you, it should be planted in late spring to early summer. Buffalograss can be established from seed, sod, or plugs (2- to 4-inch-diameter pieces of buffalograss and the adhering soil). When irrigation is not available, plant buffalograss by seed in April and May when soil temperatures reach 55°F. This helps ensure seeds receive adequate rainfall for seed germination. For sites with irrigation, summer planting of seed, sod, or plugs is preferred (June through July). Seed planted in early spring may take two to three weeks to germinate, while seed planted in mid-June germinates in about one week and tends to have fewer weeds because of this rapid establishment.



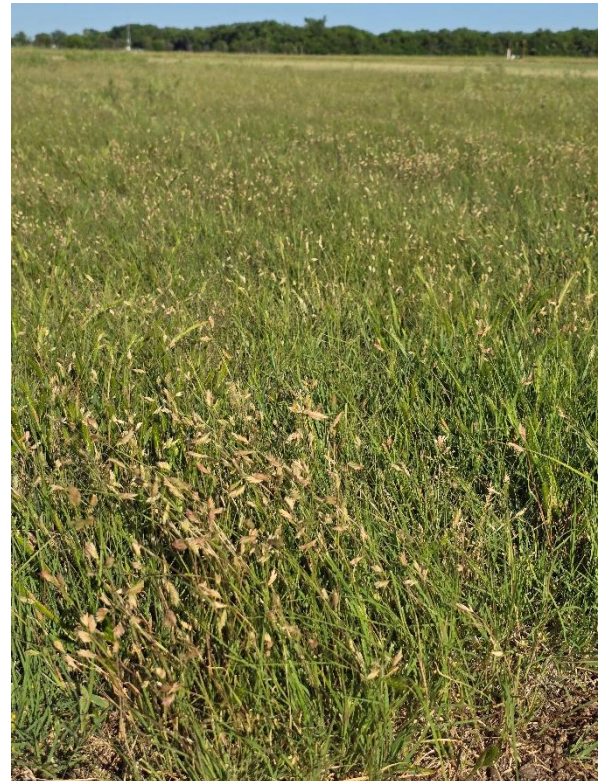
When determining whether to establish Buffalograss by seed, sod, or plugs, it is often worth noting that Buffalograss is dioecious, meaning there are male and female plants. When purchasing grass seed, you will receive a mix of both. As the turfgrass grows, you will be able to differentiate the two by the flowers. Male plants produce flowers (inflorescences) several inches tall, that stand out above the leaf blades. Female plants, however, have flowers that are close to the soil and usually not noticeable. In many cases, homeowners mow to remove male inflorescences, rather than as a result of the grass height. To reduce this

frequency of mowing, buffalograss would need to be established vegetatively, by sod or plugs, in order to establish cultivars that are generally only female plants (with no visible seedheads during the growing season).

When purchasing Buffalograss seed, make sure to purchase properly treated seed from a reputable dealer. Properly treated seeds are able to break dormancy when planted, germinating faster and more uniformly. Be aware that Buffalograss seed will cost much more than other types of grass seed, however the lower seeding rate, and long-term cost savings on water, fertilizer, and mowing will make it a good investment in the end.

An optimum seeding rate is 1.5 to 2 lbs. of buffalograss seed per 1,000 square feet, which will establish a dense lawn in one season. In larger areas or to save on costs, buffalograss can also be seeded at a rate of 1.0 lb. of seed per 1,000 square feet. It will take approximately 1.5 years to establish a high-quality lawn at this lower seeding rate. Plant seed 1/4 inch deep when irrigated, or up to 1/2 inch deep if soil moisture is limited. Buffalograss may be drill-seeded or broadcast and worked into tilled soil. Ensure good soil to seed contact. As Buffalograss germinates, it will fill in and spread by stolons (runners), becoming thicker each year. Be sure to manage weeds during establishment, as many weeds can outcompete buffalograss seedlings.

Unlike most grass seeds, most buffalograss seed can be soaked in water before planting to speed up germination, increase uniformity of emergence, and use less water for establishment. If you choose to soak seeds before planting, seeds must be planted within 3 days once the process has begun. Seed soaked for



longer may germinate in the process and make seed unusable. To soak seeds, follow these steps:

1. Place seed in a porous bag and submerge in a container of water.
2. Every 24 hours, dump the container of water, allow the sack of seeds to drain and then refill with fresh water. (Maximum of 3 days.)
3. During this time prepare the seedbed for planting. If inclement weather is likely at the time you intend to plant, the soak should be cut short and the seed planted.
4. Drain the seeds for up to 5 hours prior to planting. The drained seeds will flow through a drill or broadcast spreader once dried.
5. Plant seeds and irrigate immediately afterwards to rehydrate seeds.

Visit our [Buffalograss Lawns publication](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/buffalograss-lawns_MF658.pdf) for more information on establishment and care of Buffalograss, including recommended Buffalograss varieties for Kansas: [https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/buffalograss-lawns\\_MF658.pdf](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/buffalograss-lawns_MF658.pdf)

## Trees & Shrubs:

### **Bagworms Activity Has Begun Early In 2026:**

The unusual warm temperatures we have experienced in Kansas for most of March and April have resulted in bagworm caterpillars emerging (eclosing) from eggs. In southern Kansas, bagworm caterpillars have been emerging from eggs since about mid-April and the young caterpillars are actively feeding on plants. With the early emergence of bagworm caterpillars in regions of the state, how should you modify or adjust your bagworm treatments this year?

Every year temperature influences bagworm caterpillar emergence, with cooler temperatures delaying emergence and warmer temperatures accelerating emergence. Remember that bagworm caterpillars do not all emerge at the same time. Bagworms overwinter as eggs inside female bags attached to evergreens and other plants. Caterpillars typically emerge from the previous season's bags from mid-May through early-June. In spring, bagworm caterpillars emerge from eggs over a period of several weeks. Although some bagworm caterpillars may have emerged early, recent cool temperatures will affect the timing of emergence, which means that more bagworm caterpillars will be emerging later.



Therefore, now is the time to begin monitoring for bagworm caterpillars to optimize the timing of insecticide applications. Inspect plants once per week, especially evergreens and plants in the rose family. Whenever possible, remove old bags from the previous growing season, because each female bag may contain between 500 to 1,000 eggs. If young caterpillars and their bags are present, hand remove and place into a container of soapy water to kill them.

Normally in Kansas, insecticide applications are not recommended until late May to mid-June. This allows most bagworm caterpillars to emerge from eggs and be exposed to the insecticide application. Due to the early emergence of bagworm caterpillars this year, carefully monitor bagworm caterpillar populations. The presence of one or two bagworm caterpillars will not cause substantial plant damage. However, when over 15 to 20 bagworm caterpillars are present on a plant, ranging in size from 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch long, consider applying an insecticide if hand removal is not a feasible option. Several insecticides are effective against young bagworm caterpillars, including products that contain *Bacillus thuringiensis* subsp. *kurstaki* (Btk) and spinosad. Insecticides should be applied when young bagworm caterpillars are present. Depending on the extent of the bagworm caterpillar infestation, weekly applications of these insecticides may be required.

Keep in mind that bagworm caterpillars may continue to emerge from mid-May to early-June so regularly check plants to determine if additional insecticide applications are needed. Also, bagworms can be caught on wind currents and “balloon” in from other areas. Consequently, do not become complacent after just making one application of an insecticide. Continue to monitor for the presence of bagworm caterpillars through early- to mid-September because the older caterpillars consume more plant material.

Visit our [Bagworms – Insect Pest of Trees and Shrubs publication](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/bagworm-insect-pest-of-trees-and-shrubs_MF3474) for more information:  
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## Miscellaneous:

### **Poison Hemlock Identification & Control:**

Many people around the state are asking about poison hemlock this spring. Poison hemlock is a plant that was brought to the United States in the 1800's as an ornamental garden plant. Today poison hemlock is found throughout North America and is most frequently found growing in areas with minimal maintenance, such as along roadsides, ditches, and tree rows. While it can be found in the landscape, it is not common.

As the name suggests, all parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested by humans, livestock, wildlife, or pets. Even small amounts of fresh or dried plant material can be very dangerous if consumed. This plant is often a concern for ranchers, but home gardeners should be vigilant too. In addition to the dangers of ingesting the plant, the sap also contains phototoxic compounds that if contact the skin can cause severe skin irritation and blisters for some individuals.



Poison Hemlock grows as a biennial plant, meaning it has a two-year lifecycle. In year one the seed germinates, and a rosette of fern-like leaves develops near the ground. This stage of growth often goes unnoticed. In year two, the plant develops tall flower stalks with white flowers. Flowers bloom, produce seeds, and then the entire plant dies. The second year of growth is very noticeable, especially when the plant is in full bloom from May through July. It is also easiest to identify the plant at this time as well.

In its second year of growth, poison hemlock will reach heights of 4 to 10 feet tall. Leaves are fern-like in appearance. One of the easiest identification features is the purple spots that develop along the stem. Inside, the stems are hollow. There are no hairs along the stems or leaves of the plant. Small white flowers are grouped together into flat to umbrella shaped clusters (called umbels) 1.5 to 5 inches wide.

If poison hemlock is present in your property, it is important to act swiftly to control the plant in order to help limit seed production and future plant populations. If possible, work to identify and control the plant in its first year of growth, while the plant is still small. Poison Hemlock can always be dug up or pulled by hand, however, take precautions to avoid your skin contacting the plant sap. Wear long sleeves, pants, close-toed shoes, and gloves. Do not burn the plant to prevent accidental inhalation. Many herbicides can also effectively control poison hemlock. In lawns or grassy areas, use a selective, broadleaf herbicide, including products that contain the active ingredients 2,4-D, dicamba, clopyralid, and/or triclopyr. In areas of bare ground, or where surrounding vegetation is unimportant, non-selective herbicides can also be used, including products containing the active ingredient glyphosate.

Poison hemlock can be easily confused with several other non-harmful wildflowers in Kansas, including wild carrot (aka Queen Anne's Lace) and wild parsley. Wild carrot has a similar lifecycle and appearance (including fern-like leaves and white flowers). The primary differences, however, are that wild carrot only reaches 1-3 feet tall, has a solid stem with no purple spots, and can often have hairs on the leaves and stems. Wild parsley will also be similar but have yellow flowers.



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