Video of the Week:  Planting a Tree

FRUIT

Fruit Planting Preparation

If you plan to develop or add to your fruit garden next year, now is a good time to begin preparing the planting site. Grass areas should be tilled so grass does not compete with the fruit plants for soil moisture and nutrients. Have the soil analyzed for plant nutrients. Your local K-State Research and Extension agents have information to guide you in taking the soil sample. From that sample, the agent can provide recommendations on what and how much fertilizer to add to correct nutrient deficiencies. Organic materials such as compost, grass clippings, leaves, hay, straw or dried manure, can be tilled into the soil to help improve its condition. Time and weather conditions generally are more suitable in the fall than in the late winter and spring for preparing soil. If fruit plants can be set by early April, they will have developed a stronger root system to support plant growth than they would if planted later. (WU)

VEGETABLES

Harvesting Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes should be harvested no later than the first fall freeze because cold temperatures can damage the sensitive roots. However, you may want to harvest earlier if you prefer a smaller sweet potato. Test dig a hill to see if they are the size you want.

Sweet potatoes should be cured after being dug.
The digging process often damages the tender skin, and curing helps these small wounds heal. Place the roots in a warm, humid location for 5 to 10 days immediately after digging. A location with a temperature around 85 to 90 degrees is ideal. A space heater can be used to heat a small room or other area. Raise the humidity by placing moist towels in the room. The curing process not only heals wounds but also helps convert starches to sugars. This process improves the texture and flavor of the roots. Sweet potatoes should be stored above 55 degrees. Storage at temperatures below that injures the roots, shortens storage life and gives them an off flavor. (WU)

**Listeria Tainted Cantaloupes**

The following information comes from Steven Newman, Colorado State University, regarding safe handling of melons in light of the Listeria outbreak associated with Colorado-grown cantaloupe.

“Attached is a printable half-page information sheet provided by Larimer County Extension which may be printed in pdf form or customized in the Publisher version by counties for use at farmers’ markets. There is also a fact sheet from the University of California, Davis, which includes detailed instructions about washing and cutting melons.

This is the first known outbreak of Listeria associated with cantaloupes, but there have previously been several outbreaks of Salmonella and E. coli O157:H7 linked to melons so following recommended safe handling practices is always important.

Because a source has not been identified and information is changing daily, please keep in mind:

* Recommendations may change if a recall is issued.

* Listeria can survive and grow at refrigerator temperatures, so if a consumer has stored Rocky Ford melons in the refrigerator, it would be a good time to clean surfaces with soap and water and wash reusable shopping bags.

* Colorado Department of Health and Environment has advised high risk audiences to avoid Rocky Ford melons and this includes people age 60 and older; those with weakened immune systems from transplants or certain chronic diseases, immunosuppressive therapies or medications; and pregnant women.

* Symptoms of listeriosis can include fever and muscle aches as well as diarrhea, headache, stiff neck, confusion and convulsions. Listeriosis also can cause miscarriages and stillbirths.

Links to melon information:

CSU Farm to Table Cantaloupe Facts: http://farmtotable.colostate.edu/files/cantaloupefactsheet1.pdf

University of California, Davis, Fact Sheet: Cantaloupe: Safe Methods to Store, Preserve, and Enjoy - http://ucanr.org/freepubs/docs/8095.pdf  (WU)

TURFGRASS

Lawn Seeding Deadline Nears

September is the best month to reseed cool-season lawns such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. However, you can get by with an early to mid-October planting for tall fescue. October 15 is generally considered the last day for safely planting or overseeding a tall fescue lawn in the fall. If you do attempt a late seeding, take special care not to allow plants to dry out.

Anything that slows growth will make it less likely that plants will mature enough to survive the winter. Seedings done after the cut-off date can be successful, but the success rate goes down the later the planting date. Late plantings that fail are usually not killed by cold temperatures but rather desiccation. The freezing and thawing of soils heave poorly rooted grass plants out of the ground, which then dry and die. Keeping plants watered will help maximize root growth before freezing weather arrives. (WU)

ORNAMENTALS

Planting Trees in the Fall

The fall season can be an excellent time to plant trees. During the spring, soils are cold and may be so wet that low oxygen levels inhibit root growth. The warm and moist soils associated with fall encourage root growth. Fall root growth means the tree becomes established well before a spring-planted tree and is better able to withstand summer stresses. However, certain trees do not produce significant root growth during the fall and
are better planted in the spring. These include beech, birch, redbud, magnolia, tulip poplar, willow oak, scarlet oak, black oak, willows, and dogwood.

Fall-planted trees require some special care. Remember, that roots are actively growing even though the top is dormant. Make sure the soil stays moist but not soggy. This may require watering not only in the fall but also during the winter months if we experience warm spells that dry the soil. Mulch also is helpful because it minimizes moisture loss and slows the cooling of the soil so root growth continues as long as possible. Evergreens should be moved earlier in the fall than deciduous plants. They need at least six weeks before the ground freezes for the roots to become established. (WU)

**FLOWERS**

**Moving Houseplants Inside for the Winter**

Many people with houseplants move some of them outside for the summer to give them better growing conditions and help them recover from the stress of an indoor environment. But as fall approaches and night temperatures approach 50 F, it is time to think about bringing plants inside for the winter.

Plants that have spent the summer outside should be inspected for insects and disease before bringing them inside. A sharp spray from a garden hose can remove insects or mites from houseplant foliage. Insects in the potting soil can be forced out by soaking the pot in a tub of lukewarm water for about 15 minutes.

Houseplants that have been kept outdoors are accustomed to receiving much more sunlight than they do indoors. So how can you help houseplants acclimatize to the lower light levels inside? Houseplants brought in from outside should be started out in an area of the home that receives plenty of light, and then gradually moved to their permanent, darker location. This process should take four to eight weeks depending on the degree of difference in light levels between the initial and final location of the plant.

Understanding plant processes allows you to anticipate potential problems. Acclimatization gives houseplants a greater chance of retaining leaves and avoiding the stress of completely replacing them. (WU)

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