Horticulture 2012 Newsletter
No. 7   February 21, 2012

Video of the Week:  Growing Plants from Seed

UPCOMING EVENTS

Grape Growing Workshops Offered

Highland Community College, with funding from the Kansas Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, is hosting a series of free viticulture (grape growing) workshops around Kansas in 2012. There will be nine workshops in all, one per month February through October. The workshops will consist of "in-the-field" lecture and demonstration covering the full spectrum of season-appropriate topics. Led by Dominic Martin, HCC's Vineyard Manager and Viticulture & Enology Professor, the 3-hour workshops will be held in the following nine Kansas counties: Saline, Jefferson, Pottawatomie, Dickinson, Lyon, Douglas, Harvey, Cowley and Miami.

All of the workshops are free and open to the public. The first workshop is scheduled Monday, February 27th, 2-5pm at Smoky Hill Vineyard just north of Salina on old Highway 81, and will focus on winter pruning, double pruning as frost protection and winter herbicide applications. To RSVP, please contact either Scott Kohl at HCC at 785-456-6006 or Central Kansas District Extension Horticulture agent Jason Graves at 785-309-5850 or by email jlgraves@ksu.edu. Go to http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc3333.ashx for more information about the entire schedule of workshops and list of topics.

VEGETABLES

Tips for Gardeners New to Growing Transplants

Following are several tips that can help home gardeners in growing transplants.

Use fluorescent lamps, not incandescent bulbs. Often a south-facing window does not provide enough light to grow strong transplants and
therefore supplemental lighting is helpful. Fluorescent lights produce much less heat than incandescent bulbs. This allows fluorescent bulbs to be placed very close to the plants (2 to 4 inches) increasing the amount of light received. Additional light produces stronger plants.

Leave fluorescent lamps on long enough. Young plants do not react to day length, so lights can be left on as long as desired. Sixteen hours of light each day usually is sufficient. A timer can be used to automate the process.

Rewet a peat-based media with hot water. Though moist peat will absorb cold water easily, dry peat will not. Hot water overcomes the hydrophobic nature of dry peat. Small batches of media can be mixed with water in a sealable plastic bag to cut down on the mess.

Plants react to movement. Brushing your hand over the tops of the plants each morning and afternoon will cause them to become stockier. Use about 10 strokes each time. Strokes will not compensate for lack of light. Plants grown under inadequate light will be spindly regardless of stroking. (WU)

Sources for Tomato Seed

We published an article last week regarding tomatoes that did well in our Master Gardener trials. Several people were interested in sources for the seed. Several did not have a homeowner source, but most did. Listed below are the sources listed next to the cultivar.

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<th>Cultivar</th>
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<td>Big Beef</td>
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Lettuce

Though lettuce is most often planted directly from seed in late March to early April it can be started from transplants. Transplants allow lettuce to mature earlier so that it escapes the excessive heat that can lead to a strong flavor and bitterness. Seed should be started four to five weeks before transplanting. Because transplants are placed at the same time as direct seeding, now would be a good time to begin. Use a seed starting mix and plant shallow as lettuce requires light for germination. A soil temperature of 70 degrees will encourage germination. However, a cooler temperature of 55 to 60 degrees should be used once the plants emerge.

Time to maturity varies depending on the type of lettuce, with leaf lettuce being the quickest, followed by bibb, romaine, and buttercrunch lettuce. Head or crisphead lettuce is the slowest and is least likely to mature before becoming bitter.

Spacing also varies with type. Leaf lettuce plants are spaced 4 to 6 inches apart, buttercrunch, bibb, and romaine are set at 6 to 8 inches and head lettuce should be at least 8 inches apart in the row. Lettuce does not have an extensive root system and requires regular watering if rainfall is lacking.

Fertilize before planting according to soil test. Plants should also be sidedressed when about 1/3 grown. Sidedressing is done with fertilizers that have more nitrogen than phosphorus and potassium. Use 1/3 cup of nitrate of soda (16-0-0) or 1/4 cup of a 27-3-3, 29-5-4 or similar fertilizer per 10 feet of row. The latter fertilizers are lawn fertilizers but will work well for sidedressing as long as they do not contain weed killers or weed preventers. (WU)
Pruning Young Fruit Trees

Young fruit trees should be pruned to begin developing a strong structure of the main or scaffold limbs. This will help prevent limb breakage over the years when the scaffolds carry a heavy fruit load. Apple, apricot, cherry, plum and pear trees generally are trained using the central leader system. The growth pattern for these trees is for a center branch to be dominant.

Peach and nectarine trees are normally pruned using the open center method because they do not have a strong tendency for one shoot or branch to dominate the growth of other shoots or branches. In this system, the tree is pruned to a vase-like pattern with no central leader.

Regardless of the system used, the three to four scaffold branches should:

- Form wide angles (about 60 to 80 degrees) with the trunk.
- Be distributed on different sides of the tree for good balance.
- Be spaced about 6 to 10 inches apart on the trunk with no branch directly opposite or below another. (WU)

What Fruit Trees to Plant?

If you’re pondering that question, here are some comments on fruit trees commonly grown in Kansas. Fruit trees are a long-term investment requiring careful thought before purchase. Begin by choosing fruit you will eat, not fruit that appears attractive in the catalog. Other considerations are outlined below. Space doesn’t allow for a complete list in this newsletter. For more choices, go to the publication “Small- and Tree-Fruit Cultivars” at http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/DesktopModules/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentID=2814

You may also request this publication from your local K-State Research and Extension office.

Apples: Though we can grow a wide variety of apples in Kansas, pest-free fruit requires an extensive spray program. Apples are normally sprayed from March (dormant spray) until about two weeks before harvest. Sprays from April on throughout the growing season are applied at least every two weeks. You need two different varieties of apples to produce fruit. Recommended varieties include Jonathan, Gala, Empire, Delicious, Golden Delicious, Jonagold, and Granny Smith. Recommended apples that are disease resistant include William's Pride, Enterprise, Priscilla, and Redfree.
Planting disease-resistant apples will reduce, but not eliminate, the need for pesticide applications. None of the apple varieties listed above are resistant to the summer apple diseases sooty blotch and flyspeck. It may be necessary to periodically apply a fungicide in the summer to suppress these fruit blemishing diseases. Also, all of the varieties listed will require protection from codling moth and other insect pests.

**Cherries:** Sweet cherries (such as Bing) are not well adapted to Kansas, but sour (pie) cherries are. Cherries are borne in June, so relatively few sprays are needed. Only one tree is needed for fruit on sour cherries. Recommended sour cherries are Montmorency, Meteor, and North Star. The latter two are genetic dwarfs with Meteor reaching 10 to 14 feet and North Star growing to 8 to 10 feet.

**Apricots:** Apricot trees are quite ornamental, which is fortunate because late spring frosts usually eliminate fruit. On average, assume you will get fruit about once every 5 to 10 years. Portions of western Kansas may see fruit only once every 30 years. It is best to have two varieties for full production. Recommended varieties include Moorpark, Goldcot, Manchu, and Superb.

**Peaches:** Usually a relatively short-lived tree (10 to 12 years) that needs a great deal of pruning to keep productive. Peaches have the same problem with late frosts that apricots do but may not be quite as bad. Only one tree is needed for fruit. Try Intrepid, Early Redhaven, Redhaven, Harken, and Reliance. Intrepid blooms later than other peaches and blooms are much more frost resistant.

**Pears:** Pears are tough and are often one of the few trees that survive on an old homestead. Though trees should be sprayed, the chance of getting good fruit without spraying is much better than it is with apples. Usually, two trees are needed to get fruit. Proven pears include Seckel, Moonglow, and Duchess.

To learn how to control fruit pests see, “Fruit Pest Control for Home Gardens,” at [http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/hort2/c592.pdF](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/hort2/c592.pdF) or available from local K-State Research and Extension offices. (WU)

**FLOWERS**

**Iris Leaf Spot Control Starts Now**

Now is a good time to begin control measures for iris leaf spot by removing old, dead leaves. Iris leaf spot is a fungus disease that attacks the leaves and occasionally the flower stalks and buds of iris. Infection is favored by wet periods during the spring, and emerging leaves eventually show small (1/8- to 1/4-inch diameter) spots. The borders of these spots are reddish, and surrounding tissue first appears water-soaked, and then yellows. Spots
enlarge after flowering and may coalesce. The disease tends to be worse in wet weather and may kill individual leaves. Though the disease will not kill the plant directly, repeated attacks can reduce plant vigor so that the iris may die from other stresses. Spores are passed to nearby plants by wind or splashing water.

Because this disease overwinters in old leaves, removal and destruction of dead leaves will help with control. For plants that had little infection the previous year, this may be all that is needed. Plants that were heavily infected last year should be sprayed with chlorothalonil (Bravado Fungicide, Fertilome Liquid Fungicide, Ortho Garden Disease Control, GardenTech Fungicide Disease Control, Bonide Fungonil, Bravo Flowable Fungicide, Gordon's Multipurpose Fungicide) or myclobutanil (Immunox, Immunox Plus) starting when leaves appear in the spring. Repeat sprays every seven to 10 days for four to six sprays. Iris leaves are waxy, so be sure to include a spreader-sticker in your spray to ensure good coverage. (WU)

**ORNAMENTALS**

**Pruning Deciduous Shrubs**

Gardeners are eager to get out and do something in the landscape this time of year. One chore that can be taken care of now is pruning certain shrubs. Often, gardeners approach pruning with trepidation, but it is not as difficult as it may seem. Remember, not all shrubs need to be pruned (i.e., witch hazel), and certain shrubs, which will be identified later in this article, should not be pruned this time of year. Shrubs are pruned to maintain or reduce size, rejuvenate growth, or to remove diseased, dead or damaged branches. Deciduous shrubs are those that lose leaves each winter. Evergreen shrubs maintain foliage all year and include yews and junipers.

Deciduous shrubs are placed into three groups:

- Those that flower in the spring on wood produced last year;
- Those that flower later in the year on current season’s growth; and
- Those that may produce flowers, but those flowers are of little ornamental value.

Shrubs that flower in the spring should not be pruned until immediately after flowering. Though pruning earlier will not harm the health of the plant, the flowering display will be reduced. Examples of these types of plants include forsythia, lilac, and mock orange.
Shrubs that bloom on current season’s growth or that do not produce ornamental flowers are best pruned in late winter to early spring. Examples include Rose-of-Sharon, pyracantha, Bumald spirea, and Japanese spirea.

Pruning during the spring allows wounds to heal quickly without threat from insects or disease. There is no need to treat pruning cuts with paints or sealers. In fact, some of these products may retard healing.

There are three basic methods used in pruning shrubs: thinning, heading back, and rejuvenating. Thinning is used to thin out branches from a shrub that is too dense. It is accomplished by removing most of the inward growing twigs by either cutting them back to a larger branch or cutting them back to just above an outward-facing bud. On multi-stemmed shrubs, the oldest canes may be completely removed.

Heading back is done by removing the end of a branch by cutting it back to a bud and is used for either reducing height or keeping a shrub compact. Branches are not cut back to a uniform height because this results in a "witches-broom" effect.

Rejuvenation is the most severe type of pruning and may be used on multi-stem shrubs that have become too large, with too many old branches to justify saving the younger canes. All stems are cut back to 3- to 5-inch stubs. This is not recommended for all shrubs but does work well for spirea, forsythia, pyracantha, ninebark, Russian almond, little leaf mock orange, shrub roses and flowering quince. (WU)

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Repotting Houseplants**

As outdoor plants break dormancy and start to grow in response to the longer days and warmer spring temperatures, houseplants usually put on a spurt of growth as well. Eventually, these indoor plants outgrow their containers and need to be repotted. To check if your plants are becoming root bound and need a larger pot, inspect the root system. First, knock the plant out of its pot. Watering several hours before this operation will allow the plant to be removed more easily. On pots that are 8 inches in diameter or less, place one hand over the top of the pot with the stem of the plant passing between two fingers, and turn the plant upside down. Then rap the edge of the pot against a table. The root ball should come away from the pot. On pots that are more than 8 inches in diameter, a bit more encouragement may be needed. Place the pot on its side and rap the top edge of the pot with a rubber mallet. Turn the plant a few degrees, and repeat the procedure until the root ball releases.

Once the plant is free, take a look at the root ball. If you see a clear network of roots, the plant needs to be moved to a larger pot. If the original pot is less than 10 inches, move up an inch in size; if 10 inches or larger, increase the size 2 inches. If the pot has one or several large holes in
the bottom for drainage, cover the holes with pot shards (pieces of a broken clay pot) or gravel so that the potting mix is not washed out during watering.

It is essential that the plant sit at the same level it was in the old pot. Add enough potting mix to the bottom of the pot to ensure this. This mix will need to be firmed before the plant is placed on top of it so it doesn't settle over time. After the plant is placed, fill in around the original root ball with potting soil. Again, firm this soil with a slender stick, or tap the bottom of the pot on the table. If this firming is not done, new soil will be so light and airy that water will tend to move through it rather than through the whole root ball.

Water the plant thoroughly after repotting, but be especially careful not to overwater for about two weeks. The new soil tends to stay wet until roots penetrate. Overwatering can lead to rot. Most plants need to be repotted annually though vigorous growers may need to move up sooner. Slow-growing plants may stay in the same pot for more than a year. (WU)

**Contributors:** Ward Upham, Extension Associate

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For questions or further information contact: wupham@ksu.edu

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