

Horticulture 2011 Newsletter

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Video of the Week: Removing Straw Mulch from Strawberries: [Removing Straw Mulch from Strawberries](#)

VEGETABLES

Time to Plant Potatoes Approaching



St. Patrick's Day is just around the corner, so it is time to get seed potatoes in the ground. Actually any time from mid- to late-March is fine for potato planting. Be sure to buy seed potatoes rather than using those bought for cooking. Seed potatoes are certified disease free and have plenty of starch to sprout as quickly as soil temperatures allow. Most seed potatoes can be cut into four pieces, though large potatoes may yield more, and small less. Each seed piece should be between 1.5 and 2 ounces to insure there is enough energy for germination. Each pound of potatoes should yield 8 to 10 seed pieces.

Cut the seed 2 to 3 days before planting so freshly cut surfaces have a chance to suberize, or toughen, and form a protective coating. Storing seed in a warm location during suberization will speed the process. Plant each seed piece about 1 to 2 inches deep and 8 to 12 inches apart in rows. Though it is important to plant potatoes in March, emergence is slow. It is often mid- to late-April before new plants poke their way through the soil. As the potatoes grow, pull soil up to the base of the plants. New potatoes are borne above the planted seed piece, and it is important to keep sunlight from hitting the new potatoes. Exposed potatoes will turn green and produce a poisonous substance called solanine. Keeping the potatoes covered will prevent this. (WU)

Herbicides for Home Vegetable Gardens

Though mulches and hoeing are usually all that is needed for small vegetable gardens, homeowners with large areas may need the help of herbicides to keep ahead of the weeds. There is one preemergence and one postemergence herbicide that can be used on home vegetable

gardens.

The preemergence herbicide is trifluralin. Preemergence herbicides kill weed seeds as they germinate. They usually have no effect on weeds that have emerged. Therefore, they must be put on either before weeds come up in the spring or after weeds have been physically removed. The preemergence herbicide trifluralin is sold under the trade names of Treflan, Preen, Miracle-Gro Garden Weed Preventer, Gordon's Garden Weed Preventer Granules, and Monterey Vegetable and Ornamental Weeder.

The postemergence herbicide is sethoxydim. This product will only kill grasses; broadleaves are not affected. However, it can be sprayed directly over the top of many vegetables. Sethoxydim is sold as Poast, Monterey Grass Getter, and Hi-Yield Grass Killer. A second postemergence herbicide called fluazifop-p-butyl is labeled for commercial growers as Fusilade, but I haven't found vegetables listed on the homeowner labels, "Over the Top Grass Killer" and "Grass-No-More." Also, the other homeowner products mentioned above often do not have as many vegetables on the label as the commercial products. Even among the homeowner products with the same active ingredient, there may be slight differences among labels. Check product labels to be sure the crop is listed. Here is a list of the various herbicides and the crops for which they are labeled. Note that many of these crops will have application restrictions. For example, trifluralin can be used on asparagus, but must be applied before spears emerge. (WU)

<u>Vegetable</u>	<u>Treflan</u>	<u>Poast</u>
Asparagus	X	X
Beans	X	X
Broccoli	X	X
Cabbage	X	X
Carrot	X	--
Cauliflowwer	X	X
Corn, Sweet	--	--
Cucumber	X	X
Eggplant	--	X
Lettuce	--	X
Greens	X	--
Muskmelon	X	X
Okra	X	--
Onion	--	X
Peas	X	X
Pepper	X	X
Potato	X	X
Pumpkin	--	X
Spinach	--	X
Squash	--	X
Sweetpotato	--	--
Tomato	X	X
Turnip	X	--
Watermelon	X	X

Wet Garden Soils



With the wet winter, many soils are still too wet to work. It is important never to work garden soils that are wet. Doing so will destroy the soil structure and form clods that are slow to break down.

Test soil by grabbing a handful and squeezing. If water drips out, the soil is much too wet. Even if no water drips, use a finger to push into the soil to see if it crumbles. If it does not crumble, but rather indents, the soil is still too wet. Also, don't check

only the soil surface, but also soil close to tilling depth. Surface soil may be dry, while deeper soil is too wet.

For small gardens it is possible to allow soils to dry during periods of frequent rains by spreading a tarp over the area when rain is forecast. You may also use a tarp to protect a small area of a large garden allocated for cool-season crops. Hopefully, the rest of the garden will be dry enough when it is time to plant warm-season crops. Remove the tarp after each rain to allow the soil to continue to dry.

Use this same procedure to ensure it is dry enough to plant fruit trees when they arrive. Work the planting area when the soil is dry enough/ Then use a tarp to keep the soil from becoming too wet to plant. (WU)

FLOWERS

Fertilizing Perennial Flowers



Most flowering perennials are not heavy feeders, and once established, may not need fertilizing every year. However, a soil test or visual symptoms will help determine plant needs. Weak plants with light green to yellowish foliage will probably benefit from a nitrogen-containing fertilizer. In the absence of a soil test, apply a 10-10-10 or similar fertilizer at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet. Fertilizer should be applied as growth begins in the spring. Perennials that tend to need more fertilizer than the average perennials

include astilbe, chrysanthemum, delphinium, lupines, and summer phlox. A second application during summer may be helpful for these plants. (WU)

FRUIT

Strawberry Planting and Mulch Removal



New strawberry plantings should be set early in the growing season so that mother plants become established while the weather is still cool. The mother plants develop a strong root system during this cool period when soil temperatures are between 65 and 80 degrees F. The most appropriate planting time is mid- to late March in southern Kansas and late March to mid-April in the northern areas of the state.

Later in the season, runners and daughter plants develop. The earlier the mother plants are set, the sooner the first daughter plant will be formed and take root. These first daughter plants will be the largest plants at the end of the growing season and will bear more berries per plant the following spring.

When planting is done later, the higher temperatures stress the mother plants resulting in reduced growth, weaker mother plants and delays in daughter plant formation. Fewer and smaller daughter plants produce fewer berries, resulting in a smaller crop.

Remove all flowers during the first year. New plants have limited energy reserves that need to go toward establishing the mother plants and making runners rather than making fruit. If fruit is allowed to develop the first year, the amount of fruit produced the second year is drastically reduced due to smaller, weaker daughter plants.

Research in Illinois has shown that the straw mulch should be removed from strawberry plants when the soil temperature is about 40 degrees F. Fruit production drops if the mulch remains as the soil temperature increases. There are likely to be freezing temperatures that will injure or kill blossoms, so keep the mulch between rows to conveniently recover the berries when freezing temperatures are predicted. (WU)

TURGRASS

Core Aeration of Cool-Season Lawns

If you are planning to core-aerate your tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass lawn this spring, reserve a machine now so you can get the job done in March or early-April. Coring early in the spring gives cool-season lawns a chance to recover before crabgrass and other warm-season annual weeds start to germinate.



Core-aerating is one of the best things you can do for your lawn. It relieves compaction, hastens thatch decomposition, increases water infiltration and helps promote better root growth. Pay attention to the soil moisture level when coring. The soil should easily crumble when worked between the fingers. If it is too wet, the machine's tines will plug and it will merely punch holes in the wet soil, which increases compaction. If it is too dry, the tines will not be able to penetrate very deeply. (WU)

ORNAMENTALS

Cut Back Ornamental Grasses



Now is a good time to remove dead foliage from ornamental grasses. Grasses green up earlier if foliage is removed and are more attractive without a mixture of dead and live leaves. A number of tools can be used including hand clippers, weed whips (if the foliage is of a small enough diameter), weed whips with a circular blade, or even a chain saw. Use the top of the chainsaw bar to cut so the saw doesn't pull in debris and clog. Also, it is often helpful to tie foliage together before cutting so it doesn't interfere and is easier to

dispose of. Burning is another option — but only if it is safe and legal to do so. Note that these grasses may not burn long, but they burn extremely hot. Even so, the crown of the plant is not damaged and new growth appears relatively quickly.

If the center of the clump shows little growth, the plant would benefit from division. Dig up the entire clump and separate. Then replant the vigorous growth found on the outer edge of the clump. (WU)

Contributors:

Ward Upham, Extension Associate

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