

## Horticulture 2011 Newsletter

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Video of the Week: [Planting a Garden](#)

### VEGETABLES

#### Onions, Cabbage and Broccoli Can Be Planted Now



Last week we mentioned that these plants could withstand colder temperatures. Here is planting information. As with other vegetables, work fertilizer into the soil first. It is best to have a soil test done to determine what nutrients are actually needed. A nitrogen-only fertilizer is all many soils need. If you don't do a soil test, use a vegetable fertilizer at the suggested rate.

Normally, broccoli and cabbage are started from seed indoors and transplanted outside this time of year. Acclimated plants can withstand temperatures down to the mid to lower 20s without damage. Plants coming out of a protected environment that have not been acclimated should be gradually exposed to the wind and cold so they develop the toughness necessary to thrive in early spring conditions. This may take up to a week if plants start out "soft." When planting, use a root stimulator or transplant solution to water plants in after they are set in the ground. About 1 cup of solution per plant is sufficient.

Onions grow from sets (small bulbs) or plants. Usually, plants are more accurately labeled as to variety. Onions can be planted thickly if you plan on harvesting young plants for green onions. Those left to develop bulbs should be spaced 4 to 6 inches apart. Onions are shallow rooted, so be sure to water if the weather turns dry. (WU)

## Controlling Weeds in Home Garden Asparagus Beds



The best time to control weeds in asparagus is early spring before the asparagus emerges. A light tilling (or hoeing) that is shallow enough to avoid the crowns will eliminate existing weeds. Many gardeners like to mix in organic matter during the same operation. To keep weeds out, apply mulch.

Herbicides can also be used before asparagus emerges. Glyphosate (Roundup, Killzall) will kill weeds that are actively growing, and the preemergence herbicide trifluralin can be used to kill weed seeds as they germinate. Trifluralin is found in several products but not all of them list asparagus on the label. Those that do include Miracle-Gro Weed Preventer Granules and Monterey Vegetable and Ornamental Weeder.

No herbicides can be used during harvest. However, the end of harvest presents another opportunity. Remove all fern and spears, lightly till the bed, and mulch. You may also apply Roundup after the top growth has been removed to control virtually all of the weeds present.

Past the harvest season and after regrowth of the asparagus, options are limited. Products that contain sethoxydim can be applied to asparagus to kill grassy weeds. Sethoxydim has no effect on broadleaves. The two sethoxydim products I've found available to homeowners that are labeled for asparagus are Monterey Grass Getter and Hi-Yield Grass Killer. So what about broadleaves? Really, your only option is to pull them and look forward to next year. (WU)

## Remove Fern and Fertilize Asparagus Now



If you haven't removed last year's growth from asparagus plants, now is the time. Asparagus comes up around the first of April in Manhattan but will be earlier in southern Kansas and a bit later further north.

Also, asparagus benefits from a fertilizer application early in the spring. Fertilize according to a soil test or add 1 to 2 pounds of a 10-20-10 fertilizer per 20 feet of row before growth starts. If a soil test shows that only nitrogen is needed, apply

1 pound of a 16-0-0 product or ½ pound of a 30-4-5, 27-3-3 or similar fertilizer per 20 feet of row. Incorporate lightly with a tiller or rake in fertilizer before spears emerge. A second application at the same rate should be applied after the last harvest. (WU)

## Compost Turning



The cold, wet winter may have caused compost to cool and develop frozen areas. Turning the compost pile now may be in order so that all materials are well mixed. This will prepare the compost for use this spring. (WU)

## TURFGRASS

### How Low Should You Go?



We often are asked whether it is good to mow lower in the spring. The answer is yes and no. It doesn't hurt to mow lower than normal the first mowing or two. As a matter of fact, it can actually speed green-up by removing old, dead grass and allowing the soil to warm up faster. But the mowing height should be raised to normal after the first or second cutting to discourage crabgrass.

Crabgrass seed must have light to germinate, and a high mowing height will shade the soil. Also, root depth and mowing height are related on upright growing grasses such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass — the higher the height of cut, the deeper the root system. A deeper root system means a more drought-resistant turf.

So, how low should you go on the first cutting? On tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass, you should mow at about 1 to 1½ inches. Be careful you don't go so low that you scalp the turf. Normal mowing height for Kentucky bluegrass is 2 to 3 inches and for tall fescue is 2½ to 3½ inches. (WU)

## FLOWERS

### Pruning Hybrid-Tea Roses

The best time to prune roses is in the spring before new growth appears and after danger of killing frost. Be sure to remove dead stubs. Otherwise, canker fungi may invade stubs and progress into healthy tissue during the summer. Use sharp shears and make cuts at a 45-degree angle about a quarter-inch



above healthy buds. How much to prune after dead wood removal depends on the type of roses.

For shrub roses, pruning consists of removing dead wood. This article focuses on hybrid tea roses. With hybrid teas, there are three pruning styles, each with a specific purpose. Heavy or severe pruning is done on well-established, vigorous plants to produce large, showy flowers. Prune back to three to four healthy canes with three to six eyes per cane. Canes normally will be 6 to 12 inches long.

Moderate pruning is done on well-established, healthy plants and is designed to increase the number of flowers produced rather than increase flower size. Leave five to six healthy canes with at least seven buds per cane. Prune stems to 12 to 18 inches long.

Light pruning rejuvenates plants after years of neglect or may be performed on newly established plants. Leave five to seven canes of about 18 inches or more in length. This helps maximize leaf area for energy production and rejuvenates plants.

If your plants suffered a significant amount of winter damage, they may need to be cut back more severely than even the heavy-pruning style. This will result in a few large flowers but in this case is your only option. (WU)

## ORNAMENTALS

### How to Prune Pines



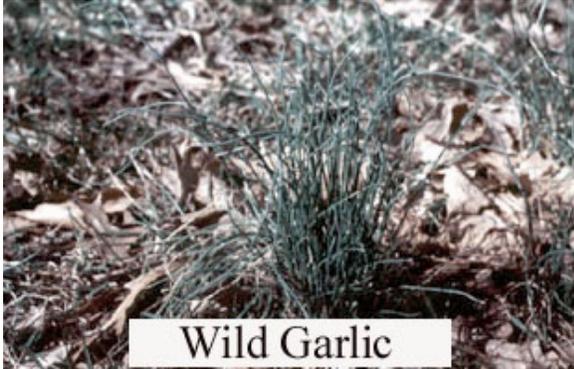
Most pines are usually not pruned except in cases where height and/or width needs to be controlled or denser growth is desired. Pines can be recognized by the arrangement of their needles, which are arranged in bundles. The most common pines have bundles of two (Austrian, Mugo and Scotch), three (Ponderosa), and five (White) needles. Ponderosa actually has a combination of two and three needle fascicles but primarily three. Pines grow by putting out a thick shoot from the terminal end of each branch in the spring. This new growth is called a candle. As the candle matures, new needles pull away from the candle and start to elongate. Pines normally are pruned in late spring when the candles have fully elongated and the new needles are starting to pull away. By cutting these candles back one-half to two-thirds, we can help control the height and width of the trees and encourage denser growth. The central leader at the top of the tree often is cut back to 12 inches and side laterals cut to maintain a pyramidal shape. Hand clippers rather than hedge shears are

recommended because they are less likely to damage new, expanding needles.

Pines do not react well to severe pruning because they normally do not produce new buds on old wood. Therefore, cutting back pines past the candles can leave a deformed tree that will not fill in. Overgrown plants need to be tolerated or removed. (WU)

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Wild Garlic, Wild Onion and Star-of-Bethlehem



Wild garlic (*Allium vineale*) and wild onion (*Allium canadense*) are two closely related plants that can become weed problems in home lawns and landscapes. Though wild garlic and wild onion look much alike, each has an odor that is characterized by its name – wild garlic smells like garlic and wild onion smells like onion. These plants are perennials that can also reproduce by seeds and aerial bulbils. Bulbils form at the top of the stem and are oval and smooth. Wild garlic also reproduces by underground bulb offsets, but wild onion does not.

Both species produce a clump of plants that is unsightly in a lawn. Control recommendations are the same though we now have a couple of new additions to our arsenal.

Traditionally we have used 2,4-D or 2,4-D + MCPP + Dicamba (i.e. Trimec, Weed-Out, Weed-B-Gon). These products should be sprayed during March on a day that is at least 50 degrees. Newer products are Weed Free Zone and Speed Zone. Both are combination products that contain a formulation of Trimec plus carfentrazone. These are more active at temperatures near 50 degrees, which is lower than traditional products. A spreader-sticker added to the spray should help any of these products be more effective. At times, the spreader-sticker is already mixed into the weed killer; no additional amount is needed. These herbicides are also effective on dandelions.

Unfortunately, we have not had a good chemical control for Star-of-Bethlehem in the past. That is now changing. A study from the University of Tennessee showed that Dismiss (sulfentrazone) gave excellent control of Star-of-Bethlehem with a single application. Other products with sulfentrazone such as Q-4 and Surge may need repeat applications. On the homeowner side, Spectracide Weed Stop 2X contains sulfentrazone but will require repeat applications.

Another second study from Virginia Tech showed 96% control of Star-of-Bethlehem one month after treatment by using Quicksilver, a formulation of carfentrazone at the rate of 4 fl. oz per acre. Quicksilver is a commercial only product, and therefore is not available to homeowners. However, both Speed Zone and Weed Free Zone contain carfentrazone and may have activity. Remember to add a spreader-sticker. (WU)

### Fungal-induced Zombie-ism

If you haven't seen this article about how some fungi turn ants into zombies, you might like to check it out: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/02/zombie-cordyceps-n-830558.html>



Erich G. Vallery, USDA Forest Service - SRS-4552, Bugwood.org

There is a video clip, too, showing the mind-altered ants and then the fungus growing out the head of the ant. It is very cool. The video is down at the bottom.

These fungi are in the genus Cordyceps. The fungus *Claviceps purpurea* is a close cousin of Cordyceps. *Claviceps* causes the plant disease ergot in cereal crops. *Claviceps* produces toxins that can ergotism in people and other animals when they eat the fungus-infested grains.

Symptoms of ergotism can include burning sensations, hallucinations, convulsions, seizures, and death. There are theories that epidemics of ergotism were associated with the Salem Witch Trials and other witch hunts. That is, during wet years, there was a lot of ergot. People ate the infested grains and therefore ingested the toxins. People felt burning sensations, hallucinations, etc., and thought they were under a spell.

But, on the plus side, some of the ergot alkaloids (toxins) have been developed into pharmaceuticals, such as some drugs for migraines. (MK)

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