



Ag & Hort Update

August 2011

Shelby County Extension

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Upcoming Events:

September 5th- Shelby County Extension
Office Closed for Labor Day

Hello readers! I just wanted to introduce myself since I will now be in charge of writing the Ag & Hort Update for Shelby County. I recently began employment as the Program Coordinator for Shelby County Extension. I graduated from Iowa State University in May with Bachelor of Science Degrees in Animal Science and Agriculture Education and Studies. I have lived in Harlan my whole life and look forward to helping answer your questions, meeting new people or seeing some old friends. Please contact me if there is anything I can do for you.

-Kristen Rutherford, Program Coordinator

DID YOU KNOW??

Ag and Hort Update is also available online!! The current and past issues are archived on our county homepage: www.extension.iastate.edu/shelby. Online newsletters also contain active links to get you to websites and publications mentioned in the articles! Contact us to be added to our email list.

Ask the ISU Garden Expert

Get answers to all your yard and garden questions at www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu. For specific questions, call the Hortline at (515) 294-3108, or email hortline@iastate.edu, Monday-Friday from 10 a.m. to noon and 1:00 to 4:30 p.m.

YARD AND GARDEN: ONIONS AND GARLIC

Harvesting vegetables at the right stage of maturity results in high quality, nutritious products. If properly harvested and stored, onions and garlic will keep most of their original flavor and food value for months. Iowa State University Extension specialists describe the correct harvesting and storage for these two vegetables.

When should you harvest onions?

Onions should be harvested when most of the tops have fallen over and begun to dry. Carefully pull or dig the bulbs with the tops attached.

What is the proper way to store onions?

After harvesting the onions, dry or cure the onions in a warm, dry, well-ventilated location, such as a shed or garage. Spread out the onions in a single layer on a clean, dry surface. Cure the onions for two to three weeks until the onion tops and necks are thoroughly dry and the outer bulb scales begin to rustle. After the onions are properly cured, cut off the tops about 1 inch above the bulbs. As the onions are topped, discard any that show signs of decay. Use the thick-necked bulbs as soon as possible as they don't store well. An alternate

preparation method is to leave the onion tops untrimmed and braid the dry foliage together.

Place the cured onions in a mesh bag, old nylon stocking, wire basket or crate. It's important that the storage container allow air to circulate through the onions. Store the onions in a cool, moderately dry location. Storage temperatures should be 32 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The relative humidity should be 65 to 70 percent. Possible storage locations include a basement, cellar or garage. Hang the braided onions from a rafter or ceiling. If storing the onions in an unheated garage, move the onions to an alternate storage site before temperatures drop below 32 F.

What is the storage life of onions?

The storage life of onions is determined by the variety and storage conditions. When properly stored, good keepers, such as 'Copra' and 'Stuttgarter,' can be successfully stored for several months. Poor keepers, such as 'Walla Walla' and 'Sweet Spanish,' can only be stored for a few weeks. If the storage temperatures are too warm, the onions may sprout. Rotting may be a problem in damp locations. Inspect the stored onions on a regular basis in fall and winter. Discard any that are starting to rot.

When should you harvest garlic?

Harvest garlic when the foliage begins to dry. In Iowa, garlic is usually harvested in August or September. Carefully dig the bulbs with a garden fork or shovel.

How do you store garlic?

After harvesting the garlic, dry the garlic in a warm, dry, well-ventilated location. Place the garlic on an elevated wire screen or slotted tray to promote drying. When the tops have dried, cut off the dry foliage 1 inch above the bulbs. Also, trim off the

roots and brush off any loose soil. Place the bulbs in a mesh bag or open crate and store in a cool (32 F to 40 F), dry (65 to 70 percent relative humidity) area. Garlic can be stored for three to six months if properly dried and stored. An alternate way to store garlic is to braid the foliage together immediately after harvest, dry and then hang the braided garlic in a cool, dry location.

YARD AND GARDEN: LATE SUMMER AND EARLY FALL PLANTINGS

Creating a beautiful, functioning landscape depends on putting the right plant in the right place at the right time. Iowa State University Extension horticulturists describe the correct plants and care to give late summer and early fall plantings.

Is fall a good time to plant trees?

Late summer and fall is an excellent time to plant balled and burlapped and container-grown trees and shrubs. Evergreens should be planted by early October in Iowa. Evergreens retain their foliage (needles) through winter. Evergreens need adequate time to get established at their new site before the onset of winter to prevent desiccation injury. Deciduous trees and shrubs drop their leaves in fall and go dormant. Deciduous trees and shrubs can be planted up to mid- to late November.

Late summer and fall planted trees and shrubs should be watered on a regular basis during the remainder of the year. Periodically check the moisture status of the plant's root-ball. Water newly planted trees and shrubs when their root-balls begin to dry out. Continue watering until the ground freezes in winter.

When is the best time to sow grass seed?

Late summer (mid-August to mid-September) is the best time to seed new lawns and overseed existing

lawns. Late summer planting has several advantages over spring seeding. The seeds of cool-season grasses germinate quickly in the warm soil of late summer. The warm days and cool nights of early fall promote rapid turfgrass growth. The growing grass also has less competition from weeds as few weed seeds germinate in the fall.

After seeding, keep the upper 1 inch of soil moist with frequent, light applications of water. Most turfgrasses should germinate in two to three weeks if the seedbed is kept uniformly moist. Gradually reduce the frequency of watering, but water more deeply, when the turfgrass reaches a height of 1 to 2 inches. Mow the grass when it reaches the height of 3 to 3 ½ inches.

Can perennials be planted in fall?

Late summer and early fall is an excellent time to plant many perennials. It also is a good time to move or divide perennials, such as peony, daylily, garden phlox and oriental poppy. Perennials planted in late summer or early fall should be mulched with 4 to 6 inches of straw, pine needles or other materials in late fall. Mulching helps prevent repeated freezing and thawing of the soil that can heave plants out of the ground. Plants heaved out of the soil may be severely damaged or destroyed due to the drying of the exposed plant crowns and roots.

Is fall a good time to plant chrysanthemums?

Unfortunately, fall planted garden mums usually don't survive the winter even when given winter protection. Flowering mums purchased in late summer or early fall should be regarded as temporary additions to the landscape. Spring is the best time to plant mums in Iowa. Spring planted mums have the entire growing season to get established and usually survive the winter much better than those planted in fall.

When is the best time to plant peonies?

Peonies are available as potted and bare root plants. Potted peonies are often available at garden centers and can be planted anytime during the growing season. Bare root peonies are best planted in late summer/early fall (September in Iowa). When planting bare root peonies, position the "eyes" (buds) 1 to 2 inches below the soil surface.

YARD AND GARDEN: PEONIES

The garden peony is a popular, long-lived perennial that provides abundant flowers in spring and attractive foliage throughout the growing season. If given a good site and proper care, an established peony will flower for many years. To have additional questions answered, contact the horticulturists at hortline@iastate.edu or call 515-294-3108.

When is the best time to transplant peonies?

September is the best time to transplant peonies. Begin by cutting the peony stems near ground level. Then carefully dig around and under each plant. Try to retain as much of the root system as possible. Promptly replant the peony in a sunny, well-drained site.

What would be a good planting site for peonies?

Peonies perform best in full sun and well-drained soils. When selecting a planting site, choose a location that receives at least six to eight hours of sunlight each day. Avoid shady areas near large trees and shrubs. Poorly drained soils can often be improved by working in large amounts of compost, peat moss or leaf mold.

What is the proper way to divide peonies?

September is the best time to divide peonies. The first step is to cut off the peony stems near ground level. Then carefully dig up the plant. Gently shake

the clump to remove loose soil from the root system. Using a sharp knife, divide the clump into sections. Each division should have at least three to five buds (eyes) and a good root system. Smaller divisions will require several years to develop into attractive plants.

When planting a peony, dig a hole large enough to comfortably accommodate its entire root system. Position the peony plant in the hole so the buds are 1 to 2 inches below the soil surface (peonies often fail to bloom satisfactorily if the buds are more than 2 inches deep). Fill the hole with soil, firming the soil around the plant as you backfill. Then water thoroughly. Space peonies 3 to 4 feet apart.

Is it necessary to periodically divide peonies?

Peonies do not need to be divided on a regular basis. Peonies can be left undisturbed in the garden for 50 or more years. However, large, vigorous peonies can be divided if you want additional plants.

When should I cut back the peony foliage?

Peony foliage should not be cut back until it is destroyed by a hard freeze in fall. The foliage manufactures food for the plant. Some of the food is stored in the plant's root system. The more food the peony plant can store in its roots, the better the flower display next spring. Cut off the peony stems at ground level in late October or November. Remove the peony foliage from the garden and destroy it. The removal and destruction of the peony debris helps to control leaf blotch and other fungal diseases.

SEEDING A NEW LAWN

A thick, healthy lawn is an important element in an attractive home landscape. The establishment of a new lawn requires careful planning and hard work. However, it is time well spent. The effort devoted to site preparation and turf establishment will be

reflected in the quality of the turf for many years.

The best time to establish a lawn from seed is from mid-August to mid-September. Late summer planting has several advantages over spring seeding. The cool-season grasses will germinate quickly in the warm soil of late summer. The warm fall days and cool nights promote rapid turf growth. Also, few weed species germinate in fall so there is little weed competition.

The first step in planting a new lawn is the establishment of the rough grade. Remove construction debris, then fill in low spots and level off high areas. The ground should slope away from the foundation of the house, drive, and sidewalks. The rough grading should be done well in advance of seeding to allow settling to occur.

At least 4 to 6 inches of good soil are needed to establish a lawn. If necessary, bring in additional topsoil or organic matter. Be sure the topsoil or organic matter is weed-free. Incorporate the additions into the top 6 inches of soil.

To determine soil fertility, conduct a soil test. Apply the recommended fertilizer, then incorporate it into the soil. Where a soil test has not been made, apply 10 pounds of a 10-10-10 or similar analysis fertilizer per 1,000 square feet and till it into the soil. The final step in soil preparation is hand raking the area. This is also the last opportunity to establish the final grade. Immediately prior to seeding, apply a starter fertilizer. A starter fertilizer is high in phosphorus.

An important key to the successful establishment of a new lawn is the selection of the best suited turfgrass species for the site. Kentucky bluegrass is the best adapted turfgrass for sunny areas that receive at least 6 hours of direct sun each day. The fine-leaf fescues perform best in shady locations. (The fine-leaf fescues include creeping red fescue,

hard fescue, chewings fescue, and sheep fescue.)

Perennial ryegrass is often used in seed mixes because of its ability to germinate and establish quickly.

For sunny locations, select a seed mix containing 80 to 90 percent Kentucky bluegrass and 10 to 20 percent perennial ryegrass. Select a mixture containing 50 to 60 percent Kentucky bluegrass, 30 to 40 percent fine-leaf fescue, and 10 percent perennial ryegrass in partially shaded sites. Heavily shaded areas that receive less than 2 hours of direct sun should be seeded with 100 percent fine-leaf fescue.

Buy a high quality seed mix. Avoid grass seed mixtures containing a high percentage of perennial ryegrass, weed seed, or inert material. The higher quality seed will be more expensive, but there will be fewer problems.

Apply the seed with a drop-type seeder or by hand. The basic requirement is uniform distribution over the area. Sow half the seed in one direction; the remaining half should be applied at a right angle to the first application. After sowing the seed, lightly rake or drag the area. The seed should be covered to a depth of 1/8 to 1/4 inch. Roll the area lightly to insure good contact between the seed and soil.

To promote seed germination, mulch the area with clean, weed-free straw. Mulching materials help to conserve soil moisture. They also prevent soil erosion and crusting of the soil surface. Do not apply too much mulch, it may smother the emerging seedlings. Approximately 50 percent of the soil should be visible through the straw. One bale per 1,000 square feet of area should be adequate. Erosion control mats or blankets (available at garden centers and home improvement stores) are excellent options when sowing seed on steep slopes and other erosion-prone areas.

After the ground has been mulched, water the area. Moisten the upper 1 inch of soil. After the initial watering, irrigate the area frequently and lightly. The objective is to keep the seedbed (upper inch of soil) continuously moist. Do not allow the seedbed to dry out during the germination period. It may be necessary to water 3 or 4 times daily on windy, sunny days. When the grass seedlings are 2 inches tall, water less frequently but deeper.

The new grass should be mowed when it is 3 inches tall. Make sure the mower blade is sharp. Mow at a height of 2 to 2.5 inches. Regular mowing through the remainder of the fall will help to thicken the turf.

..and justice for all

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Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.