



Webster County Acreage Living

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New Trees in the Landscape

Information provided by James Romer, Iowa Master Gardener Coordinator, ISUE

Trees provide beauty, shade and habitat for wildlife. They can also screen unsightly views, provide privacy, reduce noise pollution and lower utility bills.

The most common way to establish trees is to purchase balled and burlapped or container-grown plants at local garden centers and nurseries.

To successfully establish trees, it's important to follow proper planting techniques. For balled and burlapped trees, dig a hole two to three times wider than the diameter of the tree's rootball. The depth of the hole should be two or three inches less than the height of the rootball. Slope the side of the hole so the top of the hole is several inches wider than the bottom.

Grasping the tree's rootball, carefully lower the tree into the hole. The top of the rootball should be approximately two to three inches above the surrounding soil line. Make sure the trunk is straight. Then begin backfilling with the original soil. Do not add compost, peat or other organic materials to the soil. Gently firm the backfill soil in the hole with your hands.

When the planting hole is 1/2 full, cut and remove all twine and remove the burlap on the top 1/3 to 1/2 of the rootball. If the rootball is in a wire basket, remove the top 1/3 to 1/2 of the basket. Completely fill the remainder of the hole with soil. Place soil up the top of the rootball and gradually slope it down to the surrounding soil line. When finished the trunk should widen or flare just above the soil line. The last step is to thoroughly water the tree.

Newly planted trees need water, mulch and care for a couple of years after planting. The key to watering newly planted trees is to check the moisture status of the plant's rootball frequently. Since the roots of newly planted trees are initially confined to the plant's rootball, newly planted trees should be watered when the rootball (not the surrounding soil) begins to dry out.

To water the rootball, slowly apply water to the base of the tree. The frequency of watering can be reduced and the watering area enlarged as the tree's root system begins to grow into the surrounding soil. Small trees usually require watering for one or two growing seasons. It may be necessary to water large trees for 3 or 4 years.

Trees use sugars and other carbohydrates manufactured by the foliage for plant growth. Therefore, avoid the temptation to severely prune newly planted trees.

Staking is not required for most newly planted trees. If staking is necessary, allow the trunk to move or sway for proper trunk and development.

Wrapping protective material around the trunks of newly planted trees is usually not necessary.

It generally is not necessary to fertilize newly planted trees. If the trees are growing poorly 2 to 3 years after planting, fertilization may be beneficial.



Landscaping trees.

When to Test Your Well Water

Information provided by Tom Glanville, Agricultural & Biosystems Engineering Specialist, ISUE

If your drinking water comes from a public water supply, the federal safe drinking water act requires that it be sampled and tested on a regular basis. However if you live on an acreage and have a private well, it is up to you to make sure the system is properly inspected and tested for safety.

Iowa gets most of its rainfall April through June and this makes it one of the best times to test your well. During this wet period excess water picks up bacteria, nitrate and recently-applied lawn and crop chemicals as it percolates through the soil. If your well water is safe dur-

ing this time, the odds are that it will be safe the remainder of the year.

Water testing services are offered by both private and state-operated laboratories. The Webster Co. Extension office sells the kit from the University Hygienic laboratory (Iowa's official state environmental laboratory) for a fee of \$14. It contains a sterile vial along with instructions on how to take the sample and covers the basic test (coliform bacteria and nitrate). There are so many contaminants in the environment and testing for all of these would be expensive and time consuming.

Storm Damage—Will Your Insurance Protect You?

Information provided by Cynthia Fletcher, Human Development & Family Studies, ISUE

Severe storm season is fast approaching in Iowa. Storm damage comes in many forms such as: a tree fell on the roof; strong winds blew out the car windows; or the sewer backed up into the basement due to heavy rains. Will your insurance cover these things?

The Iowa Insurance Division offers the following recommendations:

- When contacting your agent or insurance company, keep track of the representative's name and date and time of the call.
- Document your losses. Take photographs of damaged property.

- Don't make permanent repairs until after talking to the insurance company's adjuster. The company may require a visual inspection before it will process the claim.
- If the claim is denied and the denial seems improper, first review the policy. Then, appeal to the insurance agent or the company's claim manager. For information about further action, contact the Iowa Insurance division at 877-955-1212.

It is always a good idea to inventory your personal property and store the information in a safe place, such as a safe deposit box at a financial institution, but not on the actual property.

Morel Mushrooms *Information provided by ISUE Answerline 1-800-262-3804*

Morel Mushrooms are the wild mushrooms that people pick in April and May. The season usually lasts 3-4 weeks. The size of the Morel depends upon spring rains and warm temperatures.

The safe Morels are those that have the hollow stem. The tops of a Morel look like a sponge. Once picked (not washed) you can store them in the refrigerator safely for 1-2 days – 3 days at the most. Do not soak in water. They are best if you use a mushroom brush (brush them before cooking). If you feel you must put water on them, do a quick rinse. Early spring Morels don't have bugs. After late May, some mushrooms may need to be soaked because of insects.

When cooking Morels, most people cut in half or slice, rinse, dip them in beaten egg, then dip in flour or cracker crumbs, and fry them in a small amount of margarine or butter. They are usually crisp and brown in 3-4 minutes. You may freeze Morels and even blanch them, however **WILD MUSHROOMS CAN NOT BE CANNED SAFELY.**



Vegetables & Flowers Suitable for Early Planting

Content provided by Horticulture & Home Pest News, March, 2003 Issue.

- ◆ **Radishes** – Spring radishes are a cool season crop. They can be planted as soon as the ground can be worked in late March or early April. Most cultivars mature in 20 to 30 days. For a continuous harvest, sow seeds every 7 to 10 days until late spring.
- ◆ **Broccoli, Cauliflower, and Cabbage** – These are cool season vegetables, which grow best in temperatures between 60 and 70°F. In central Iowa, plant in mid-April.
- ◆ **Lettuce, Spinach, Collards, and Kale** – Quality of these plants are reduced with the onset of hot weather due to seed heads and bitter taste.
- ◆ **Onions** – Plant onion seeds, sets, and plants as soon as the ground can be worked in spring (late March or early April in central Iowa). Long-day varieties are the best choice for Iowa gardeners.
- ◆ **Peas** – Garden, snow, and snap peas should be planted as soon as the ground can be worked in spring. The crop should be mature in approximately 60 to 70 days.
- ◆ **Carrots** – Carrots can be sown from early spring to early August. For an early crop, sow seeds in early to mid-April.
- ◆ **Potatoes** – Plant certified disease-free potatoes as soon as the ground can be worked in spring. Large potato tubers should be cut into pieces, each containing 1 or 2 growing points or “eyes”. Small potatoes may be planted whole.
- ◆ **Beets and Swiss Chard** – These are other vegetables to plant early through August 1st.
- ◆ **Pansies** – Will withstand late seasons frosts. Prefer cool weather and tend to decline with the onset of warmer weather.
- ◆ **Roses** – If necessary, transplant roses as soon as the ground can be worked in late March or Early April. Bare-root roses should be planted immediately after purchase. If planting must be delayed, place the bare-root roses in a cool location, such as the garage or refrigerator, until they can be planted.

No Substitute for Pumping

By Gary Boerner, Retired Webster County Sanitarian

You see it on television – an advertisement for a product that if added to your septic tank will eliminate the need to ever have your tank pumped. **SAVE YOUR MONEY!** Additive manufacturers promise that their product will fix failed drainfields, clear out pipe deposits, reduce odor, eliminate pumping, etc. Even though research does not support these claims, there are still more than 1,200 products on the market.

Additives are either chemically or biologically based. Chemical additives are usually comprised of strong oxidizing agents and organic chemicals. Their purpose is to break down solids in a septic tank and allow the suspended materials to leave the tank. This they do, but the suspended solids will then clog the soil, leading to drainfield failure and possible groundwater contamination. Biological additives are two types: solid biological additives that are composed primarily of cereal grains or a similar filler and liquid biologic additives that are comprised almost 100% water. Their claim is to enhance the biological activity in a septic tank by feeding and increasing its level of bacteria and enzymes that will breakdown the accumulations of solids in the tank.

The bacteria in a septic tank will occur naturally and require no “food” (additives) to increase their numbers. Most experts will agree that while not needed, biological additives will not harm the environment. But chemical additives are potentially harmful to the environment by interfering with the digestion in a septic tank causing the effluent (the liquid leaving the tank) to damage the structure of the soil leading to drainfield failure with possible ground water contamination. Some states have even banned the use of organic chemical additives. Other states have adopted consumer protection requirements that manufacturers cannot claim that the additive will eliminate the need for septic tank pumping or proper maintenance.

One chemical that can be safely used is copper sulfate. It is effective as a root-killer and will not interfere with septic system performance IF used in recommended dosages.

Septic tank additives cannot take the place of periodic pumping of the tank (4-5 years recommended) and proper maintenance. In fact, they may decrease the life of the septic system and cause harm to the environment.

Questions Asked During the Months of April & May

Q. How deep should I plant onion sets?

A. Before planting, separate the bulbs into two size groups, those smaller than a nickel in diameter and those larger. The larger sets often produce a flower stalk and don't produce good-sized bulbs. Use the larger sets for green onions. The smaller sets can be allowed to develop into mature onions. Plant your sets in early spring as soon as the ground can be worked. Sets should be planted at a depth of 1 to 1 1/2 inches. For dry onions, plant sets two to three inches apart. Sets grown for green onions can be planted closer together. Space rows 12 to 18 inches apart.

Q. When can I divide my rhubarb plants?

A. Early spring is the best time to divide rhubarb plants. Dig up plants as soon as the ground can be worked in spring. Divide each plant into sections with a large knife or spade. Each section should have at least two to three buds or shoots and a large section of the root system. Replant immediately. Set the sections in the ground at the same depth as they grew previously. Water thoroughly. Continue to water the plants on a weekly basis during dry weather through the remainder of the growing season.

Q. What would be a good soil mix for a raised bed?

A. Raised bed soils should be light and well-drained. An excellent mix can be prepared by mixing equal parts top soil, organic matter (well-rotted manure, compost, or peat), and coarse sand. Before filling raised beds, work up the existing soil with a rototiller or spade. Add a few inches of the soil mix, then incorporate it into the existing soil. Continue to do this until the raised bed is filled.

Q. Why does my crabapple tree bloom profusely ever other year?

A. Some trees, such as fruit trees and crabapples, bloom heavily one year and then sparsely the following year. Hand thinning of excess fruit on fruit trees will help to overcome this tendency to flower and bear fruit in alternate years. When selecting a crabapple, choose a variety that blooms heavily on an annual basis.

Q. I just planted some blueberries. When can I expect them to grow?

A. Blueberry plants should not be allowed to bear fruit the first two years after planting. Any blossoms that form should be removed. The plants should come into full production by the 5th or 6th year.

Q. I can't get grass to grow under my large maple tree. What are my options?

A. Most turfgrasses have a difficult time growing in the vicinity of large shade trees. Areas around and beneath the trees can be mulched with wood chips or shredded bark. Planting a shade tolerant groundcover in the area is another possibility. Shade tolerant groundcovers include: bugleweed, wild ginger, barrenwort, sweet wood-ruff, hosta, and spotted deadnettle.

Q. What materials would make a good mulch for a vegetable garden?

A. Lawn clippings, straw and leaves are excellent mulches for the vegetable garden. Allow lawn clippings to dry before applying them. Fresh clippings may get hot and produce an unpleasant odor. If the lawn has been treated with a broadleaf herbicide, don't use the clippings until the lawn has been mowed two or three times after the application. Straw should be free of crop and weed seed. Suitable materials include wheat, oat and soybean straw. Leaves should be shredded or composted before applied. Shredded or composted leaves are less likely to blow away in the wind. A mulch depth of 2 to 4 inches would be appropriate when applying these materials.

