

For spring gardens, start vegetables and flower indoors

K-State horticulture expert offers tips for buying, caring for seed

K-State Extension
News Service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – In case cabin fever has Kansas gardeners longing for warmer days, there’s good news: January marks an early opportunity to get some vegetables and flowers started.

“January is often a cold and dreary month for many gardeners,” said Cynthia Domenghini, a horticulture expert with K-State Extension. “But planning for and starting vegetables and flower transplants from seed can make this a much more interesting time of year.”

Domenghini outlined the steps needed to purchase and plant seeds indoors in a recent issue of the Horticulture Newsletter, a weekly publication from Kansas State University that is available online and by email.



Many vegetables need to be started in January if gardeners intend to transplant them to the outdoor garden in March or April, says K-State horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini.

Her recommendations include:

Purchase recommended, quality seed. The varieties recommended for Kansas are available in a publication from K-State Extension. “Also, talk to your neighbors, friends and your local garden center about what has worked well for them,” Domenghini said.

Obtain your seeds from a reputable source. These may include garden centers and seed catalogs. “If choosing seeds from a business that does not specialize in plants, pay special attention to the package date to make sure the seed was packaged for the current year,” Domenghini said. “Though most seed remains viable for about three years, germination

decreases as seed ages.”

Determine the Date to Seed. You should know the target date for transplanting outside, and the number of weeks needed to grow the transplant indoors.

Sowing seed. Do not use garden soil to germinate seed. It is too heavy and may contain disease organisms. Use a media made especially for seed germination.

Domenghini said additional tips include keeping seed moist and growing the seeds in appropriate lighting and temperature conditions. A little TLC also helps, she said.

“Plants react to movement,” Domenghini said. “Brushing over the plants with your hand stimulates them to become more stocky and less leggy. Try 20 brushing strokes per day. However, brushing will not compensate for a lack of light or over-crowding.”

Move plants outdoors prior to transplanting so that they will become hardened to the sun and wind. “Start about two weeks before transplanting and gradually expose the plants to outside conditions,” Domenghini said. “Increase the number of hours and degree of exposure over a two-week period.”

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions to hortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Extension office.

TALLGRASS & TUMBLEWEEDS

The Curious Case of the Catcicle

Dear Readers,

Everybody loves a mystery. And there is nothing more mysterious than cats. They live their lives in feigned appreciation of our care, devotion and servitude. We get rewarded for our efforts with the occasional purr and rub against the legs. I’m not going to get into the tall grass exploring their many eccentricities here. Let’s just say if you got cats you KNOW cats. Meaning you know very little about their private lives. My cats are country cats, indoor-outdoor cats, and though I can predict their behaviors while inside the house I haven’t a clue as to what they get into when making their daily rounds. I



inquire, of course. “So what have you been up to today?” And even if they could talk I doubt they would tell me.

But every now and then they appear in such a state of dishevelment one feels the need for an investigation. “Why are you missing half your ear?” “Why are you covered in motor oil?” “Why are you wrapped in

the neighbor’s Christmas lights?” What happened this morning is one of those things. And this column is as much a vehicle for catharsis for me as it is a mystery to be solved. Today I am Sherlock Pike (or perhaps more appropriately Agatha Pike) and I relate to you The Curious Case of the Frozen Cat.

When I went to feed the chickens this morning I heard a forlorn mewling coming from the pond. It was such a disturbing and foreign moan I wasn’t at first sure what it was. But upon further inspection I saw it was from my big yellow long-haired fellow, sitting on the dock and crying in despair. But when I called him he would not get up. Well, COULD not get up because he was literally frozen to the dock, which has a steel deck. He was shivering like Jell-O and his paws, stomach and tail were inexorably attached to that steel. I noticed a trail of water leading from the pond (which was frozen) down the dock to where he

was glued. And this dock is a good three feet above pond level.

I deduced, using my detective skills in Forensic Catology, that this cat somehow got onto the ice, fell through, managed to claw himself out (or levitated out of the water up onto the dock) where, exhausted, he squatted down on the steel deck for a little rest and promptly got stuck there and like the proverbial tongue on the flagpole.

Warm water released my Catcicle’s bonds. He was trundled in towels and hauled inside to the couch and a heating pad where after an eternity of uncontrollable shivering he finally regained his body-heat.

And I am ecstatic to say fully recovered. However, he was not unaffected by his adventure. He curled up in the sun through the window and slept for 16 hours, closely monitored by Nurse Agatha.

Though all’s well that ends well I have to say that had I gone to feed those chickens an hour later this story would not have so happy and ending. But it did. And as of this moment, to my chagrin, Mr. Eight Lives Left is out and about doing whatever it is he does, hopefully having learned to keep off the ice.

Keep your eyes on the stars and your back to the wind.

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year. He has said he would prefer to eliminate early voting and complained that women stole the 2022 election on abortion rights after seeing them in long lines at polling places ahead of Election Day.

On Tuesday, Proctor’s committee advanced House Bill 2446, which would drop the requirement that a treasurer’s name appear on a candidate’s political advertisements, and House Bill 2438, which bans non-government websites from assisting with voter registration applications.

The committee is scheduled on Thursday to hear House Bill 2451, which would prohibit public employees from advocating for or against proposed constitutional amendments

while on the clock or with public resources. There is an exception for office holders who are seeking reelection or, like Proctor, a party nomination for office.

Voters in August will consider rewriting the Kansas Constitution to elect Supreme Court justices and abandon the current merit-based selection process.

Bitter fruit

Rep. Steve Huebert, a Valley Falls Republican, told the committee about how he had tried to move elections to even-numbered years more than a decade ago when Republican Gov. Sam Brownback was in office.

Huebert said he was driven by the need to increase turnout in local elections. But, he lamented, special interest groups fought the idea. As a compromise, the Legislature narrowly passed legislation that instead moved local elections from March to November in odd-numbered years.

“I remember being told by the governor, ‘Great job — you got half an apple.’ I jokingly told him, ‘Yeah, we got the half the apple with a worm in it, because it’s not going to accomplish its goal,’” Huebert said.

Ballotpedia writer Spencer Richardson provided voter turnout numbers for the committee

that illustrate the stark discrepancy between local and statewide elections. Voter turnout in Kansas is 62% during presidential years, 46% for midterms and 20% in off-years, he said.

But numerous opponents questioned whether voters would be more likely to know anything about local candidates, even if turnout improved.

Harvey County Clerk Rick Piepho brought sample ballots for local elections that were already two full pages long for a single precinct. Merging elections would increase voter confusion, he said.

“It will increase the total number of votes for a candidate, because there’ll be people that wouldn’t make the effort in an odd year to go vote for a city election, that will actually mark a candidate if they were combined,” Piepho said. “But it’s not proven whether they would be an informed voter or not, whereas, at least the ones that are turning out now, I would say, are probably informed, because they’re making an effort to come vote in an odd year.”

Simmons, the Topeka Democrat, asked Piepho if he had any recommendations for how else they could increase voter turnout. Piepho said turnout is determined by what’s on the ballot.

“That’s my favorite testimony today,” Proctor said. “Turnout is determined by

what’s on the ballot, and if you only have a handful of local races, you get less turnout.”

Getting out the vote

Voting rights advocate Melissa Stiehler, of Loud Light, told Proctor’s committee she was “thrilled that you all care about voter turnout.”

“That isn’t typically something that’s a priority in a lot of the bills that you all hear and work in this committee,” she said.

Stiehler said Loud Light was opposed to the bill because there were too many unknowns. She said she was worried about the effect on local issues as candidates worked to get out the vote.

“Do you think that your local school board member is going to effectively be able to run a GOTV campaign with getting donors and volunteers in comparison to the presidential race?” Stiehler said. “Do you think that your pothole is going to get the attention that foreign policy gets in that election?”

She said it may be difficult for candidates to find printers for their mailers, and costs will rise for ad time, if local and statewide elections were held simultaneously.

“Making major electoral changes that will impact every Kansas voter, that will impact every elected official, deserves the due diligence of finding out the facts and evidence and

legislating based on that,” she said.

Shannon Kimball, a Lawrence school board member who testified on behalf of the Kansas Association of School Boards, said the organization has a longstanding policy of asking the legislature to keep school board elections nonpartisan and in odd-numbered years.

“We have maintained that position in belief that public education is best governed by locally elected citizens who are committed to serving their communities and are not accountable to partisan political structures,” Kimball said.

Rep. Paul Waggoner, a Republican from Hutchinson, asserted without evidence that “many people will not run for school board races because so few people vote.”

Kimball rejected his assertion.

“They run not because they are excited about the process of campaigning or partisan politics. They run because they really care about our public schools,” she said.

Waggoner’s response: “For the fact of the matter, there’s plenty of people on school board elections who could not win a higher office, because a higher percentage of people in their community who actually voted, that such a person would not receive a majority.”

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