

Under Utilized Gardener Resources

There are so many wonderful tours available for home gardeners to aide in the planning, planting and care of lawns, trees, fruit, vegetables and landscapes. Often overlooked, these are a few resources I think every gardener should utilize!

Soil Testing

One of the most common questions gardeners have is how to fertilize specific plants. Many plants have individual nutrient needs, but for all plants it is challenging to *guess* at what you need without *knowing* what you have. Although soil tests are generally done to find out what nutrients are deficient, it is just as important to know if you have adequate levels already present.

The most basic soil test K-State offers checks soil pH and levels of phosphorus and potassium. Most of the lawn and garden soil tests that come out of our soil-testing lab show more than adequate levels of both phosphorus and potassium. If those nutrients are not needed, applying them would be a waste of money and can become a source of pollution. In extreme cases, excess phosphorus can even interfere with the uptake of micronutrients.

In Shawnee County, the basic soil test for gardeners cost \$10 per sample. For most of the year, grant money covers the cost of the first test. Additional information about soil testing can be found on our website: <https://www.shawnee.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/soil-testing.html>

Kansas Mesonet

The Kansas Mesonet is an online database comprised of data from weather stations across the state. These K-State Research and Extension weather stations were first established in 1986 and many are co-located with National Weather Service Cooperative Observing Stations.

In Shawnee County, we have one station in Rossville and another in Silver Lake. These stations are constantly monitoring and tracking many factors including; soil temperature, precipitation, air temperature, humidity and wind speed. As the stations track this information they upload it to the website every five minutes.

Weather data is critical for the timing of certain herbicides, lawn seeding, transplanting, establishing an irrigation schedule and many other gardening tasks.

To access this free resource, go online and visit the Kansas Mesonet website, <http://mesonet.k-state.edu/> or simply search for "Kansas Mesonet" and click on the first link. The landing page will show you a map of all the stations across the state. From here you may select at the top of the map either temperature, 24-hr precipitation or wind. The map will then reflect those values for each station.

For the weekly summaries, go up to the top left of the screen and select the menu. From this menu you'll click on 'Weather' and then 'Weekly Summary'. Under the same selection of 'Weather,' you may also select the 'Historical Data' option from the menu and select any range of days as long as those dates span less than one year's time. Additional information available on the Mesonet includes fire conditions, soil moisture and degree days for agricultural crops.

Recommended Plant Lists

Knowing what to plant is one of the most essential parts of a successful garden. Often that means selecting a plant that is suited for our hot summers and frigid winters but plant selection can also deal with soil conditions, desirable plant features and disease resistance. KSRE offers many recommended plant lists including: conifer trees, daylilies, flowering crabapples, fruit trees, hosta, iris, ornamental grasses, shade and ornamental trees, roses, deciduous shrubs, evergreen shrubs, tomatoes, turfgrass and vegetables. All of these publication and more can be found on our website:

<https://www.shawnee.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/gardenerresources.html>

Compost Bin Program

Thanks to our partners at the Shawnee County Refuse Department, any Shawnee County resident can pick up a free voucher for a compost bin at our office. These bins help to reduce the amount of waste going into landfills as well as providing free organic matter for the home gardener! Vouchers and information on composting can be picked up at the Shawnee County Extension Office, 1740 SW Western Ave. Topeka, KS.

Horticulture Newsletter

Each Tuesday, Ward Upham, a K-State Horticulture Specialist, writes an excellent newsletter on the hot horticulture topics from across the state. The newsletter is available for free online: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/newsletters/> . I read the newsletter every week and it always helps me answer client's questions! You can expect to find information on trees, lawns, flowers, fertilization, vegetables, fruit, garden tools and much more. An additional helpful feature of the website is that it allows you to sort through archived newsletters from years past!