

Radio Program 3/24/2020
Container Gardening

Good morning gardeners. How many of you have gotten outside in your gardens and got something planted? I would wage a bet that not many of you have as we have only had a week in early March where getting into the garden was even possible. Why you may ask... too much moisture.

Resist the temptation to work any soil if it is wet. Doing so destroys the structure of the soil resulting in clods that may not break down all summer. To determine if a soil is too wet to work, grab a handful and squeeze. If water comes out, it is much too wet. Even if no water drips out, it still may not be dry enough to work. Push a finger into the soil you squeezed. If it crumbles, it is dry enough, but if your finger just leaves an indentation, more time is needed.

Be sure to take your handfuls of soil from the depth you plan to work the soil because deeper soils may contain more moisture than the surface. If there is a small area that you wish to plant in a few weeks and it is much too wet to work, try tarping the area during wet weather and uncovering when it is dry. This may allow the soil to dry enough to work by the time you are ready to plant.

So where does that leave us?? Container gardening.

Now when I say container gardening, I don't mean just growing vegetables in containers. It's just a broad term used to talk about growing plants in containers whether they be vegetables or flowers. Before we begin talking containers, I should remind you that all vegetable crops are going to need 6-8 hours of sunlight to produce for you. So they may not be able to sit on the porch or under a tree, you may have to think about which areas of your lawn get the most sunlight.

So let's begin shall we. How many of you listening have grown plants in containers and struggled? Trust me when I say you are not alone. The first step in container gardening is picking your container. The most common types of containers are plastic, clay, or ceramic. To me it doesn't matter what kind it is just make sure that you have a drainage hole in the bottom, if it doesn't put it back on the shelf and pick another one. (unless it's a plastic container then you can make your own holes.) I often get asked how big of a container should I get, K-State usually says somewhere between 12-inch diameter and 24-inches in diameter pots. But it truly depends on what you are going to grow. Leafy crops such as spinach and lettuce can survive in shallower smaller diameter pots while tomatoes are going to need a larger pot to survive. Not only does diameter matter but we also need to think about the depth of the pot. Shallower pots don't have the water holding capacity as deeper pots do.

Now the biggest reason I see people struggle with container gardens is based on what soil you use. Did you use soil from your garden or did you use potting soil? I would strongly recommend potting soil as soil from the garden will compact when we go to watering it regularly, basically

cutting off oxygen to the roots of our plants. If you have a big pot you can always put some garden soil in the bottom and then the last (top) 10-12 inches of the pot should be potting soil. Most potting soils will have fertilizer in them to begin with so you won't initially have to apply any fertilizer but you will have to as we go through the growing season as we water nutrients will run out of the drainage hole. If you plan on starting crops from seeds please make sure that there is not a weed killer contained in the potting mix as it will kill your vegetable seeds too.

The next thing we need to think about is watering. This will likely depend on the type of spring/summer we are having. If it's wet then you won't have to water as much, if it's dry then we will likely be watering at least once a day. When we water we don't want to just wet the surface down we want to water till water comes out at the bottom of our container (this is why we need drainage holes). I would recommend that we not wet the foliage of the plants, especially in the evening as then the leaves have a higher chance of getting staying wet all night long which is a great breeding ground for fungi and bacteria. If you need to water multiple times a day, try to find a way to do that without getting the leaves wet such as a soaker hose. Another cheap self-irrigation system for these small containers is using an old milk jug. Drill a hole in the bottom and set it down on the soil media and let it trickle out. (Might have to stake down the jug so it doesn't blow away.)

If you are looking for more information regarding container gardening, you might google Container Gardening EP-31, Growing Vegetables in Pots MF-2873, Growing flowers in pots MF-2874, Vegetable planting guide MF-315 or for more gardening information you can look up the Kansas Garden Guide S-51.

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