

IN THE DIRT

*Crabgrass Control
Time for second
preemergence application*

Preemergence herbicides (PREs) applied in April, especially early April or earlier, will be nearing the end of the products control window and a second application may be needed. With cooler soil temperatures this spring, some crabgrass seed germination was delayed and a late April into early May PRE application would have been close to ideal. Crabgrass will continue to germinate through June and into July. Look at when the first application of PRE was made and consider a second application if needed. General management of crabgrass includes correct lawn care practices to encourage a dense turf that shades out crabgrass seeds/seedlings. Use a mowing height of 3.5 inches.

Timely Tips for New Vegetable Gardeners

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

The number of vegetable gardens planted this year increased. This was due to people looking for new ways to spend their time and because home food production is on the rise. Here are some timely tips for new gardeners or reminders for experienced gardeners.

One key to growing quality vegetables is uniform growth. To help achieve this, keep soil uniformly moist. Do not allow vegetable gardens to dry completely between irrigation or rainfall. This leads to start and stop growth resulting in odd-shaped and bitter tasting vegetables.

Most crops need about one inch of water per week between rainfall and irrigation. If using sprinklers or overhead irrigation, water early in the morning. This is the most efficient time to irrigate as temperatures are cooler and wind velocity is lower.

Morning irrigation also allows sunlight to dry leaves quicker to reduce disease. Vegetables are susceptible to a number of leaf diseases. Most are fungal and require moisture on leaves for a set time before infection occurs. Watering early and locating gardens where there is good air circulation limits disease.

Mulching soil also reduces disease and conserves moisture. Many diseases are soil borne and splashed onto lower leaves during rain or sprinkler irrigation. This is why foliar diseases often move from the

bottom of a plant upward. Mulch covers soil to prevent soil splash along with conserving moisture and reducing weeds.

Now that soils have warmed, it's time to apply mulch such as grass clippings, hay or wood chips. Know that hay or straw often contains weed or grain seed which become weeds in the garden. Wood chips work well but are slower to decompose. Grass clippings are abundant and often used as mulch but must be used correctly.

If herbicides have been applied to the lawn, read the label for directions. As a rule, avoid using clippings from lawns treated with herbicide on vegetable gardens. However, a label might state a recommended time to wait before using clippings as mulch.

Some herbicide labels will state clippings from a treated lawn should not be used as mulch at all. One example are products containing the active ingredient quinclorac. If nothing is stated on the label about grass clipping use, and you still want to use the clippings, a general rule is to wait four mowings.

When grass clipping are used as mulch, allow them to dry first. Fresh or wet grass clipping can mold and become matted so water and oxygen can't pass through. Apply grass clippings as a thin layer of about two inches to allow oxygen exchange. Soil oxygen is as important to uniform plant growth as soil moisture.

An often overlooked task by new gardeners is thinning of seedling plants. Check the plant tag or seed package. It will tell how far apart to thin seedlings after they are growing. If not thinned, plants will become overcrowded and will not grow or produce as well.

And of course weed control is needed or weeds will compete with vegetables for moisture and nutrients to reduce yield and quality. Mulching, hand pulling and hoeing once a week or more often is the best means of weed control in vegetable gardens. Don't hoe too deep so vegetable roots are injured.

As for fertilizer, a rule of thumb is to side dress plants about one month after planting. This means spreading fertilizer alongside a row or around hills and lightly scratching it into soil. Don't worry too much about the brand of fertilizer you buy; just read and follow the label rate. If too much nitrogen is applied, it will burn plant roots and slow growth.

Young Strawberry Care

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

With home gardening for food production on the rise, strawberries are one of the easiest fruits to grow. If you planted June-bearing strawberry plants this spring, be sure to pinch off all blossoms that develop this year.

Blooming and fruit production uses a lot of a plants energy in the form of carbohydrates and sugars produced during photosynthesis. New plants have a limited amount of stored energy and undeveloped roots.

If blossoms are not removed, energy that needs to go to root and runner development the first year is used to develop fruit instead. Young plants allowed to produce fruit will eventually produce runners, but these runners will not be strong enough to produce a good crop of berries next year.



For the plant population needed for a good crop next year, early runner development is needed. Early runners formed this year will produce far more strawberries than runners that form later this season.

Along with weed control and correct watering, be sure to pinch blossoms off of newly planted June-bearing strawberries.

I refer to June-bearing strawberries because this is one of three types of strawberries. The other two are everbearing and day neutral. While early blossoms should be picked off of these too, they could be allowed to produce berries later in the season.

Of the three types of strawberries, June-bearers are the best to grow in Nebraska as they produce the largest fruit and greatest overall yield. June-bearing strawberries produce a single crop during late May and June. Plants come into full production the year after planting and usually out yield everbearing types.

For Nebraska, some early fruiting June-bearing cultivars include Earliglow and Early Red; mid-season cultivars are Chandler, Honeoye, Jewel, Surecrop, Dunlap, Red

Chief, and Guardian; and later June-bearing cultivars include Robinson, Sparkle, and Bounty.

Ever-bearing strawberries do not bear fruit all summer as the name suggests. They produce two small crops. One in June and a second in late summer. High temperatures and moisture stress often reduce yield and quality of the second crop of everbearing cultivars such as Ogallala and Ft. Laramie.

Day neutral strawberries have the potential to produce fruit throughout the growing season; however, they stop flower bud initiation when temperatures are above 85 degrees Fahrenheit. As this occurs often in Nebraska, day neutral cultivars like Tristar and Tribute are not the best choice for our area.

You will have good success with strawberries if the location they are planted in is in full sun and the soil is well drained. If you are still preparing to plant, incorporate some compost into the soil prior to planting to increase organic matter and improve drainage.

Because strawberries are perennial broadleaf plants, there are few herbicides that will selectively control weeds without harming strawberries. For weed control, use a two inch layer of mulch and hand weed or carefully hoe as needed.

Strawberries need a uniformly moist soil but will not tolerate wet roots. This is why a well-drained soil is important. When watering, avoid keep the soil wet or saturated but don't allow the soil to dry out too much between irrigation.