

# IN THE DIRT

Northeast Nebraska  
Master Gardener

Plant Fair

May 4, 2012

6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Northeast Community  
College

<http://madison.unl.edu/theplantfair>

## Weekend Project: Making Seed Tapes

If you're antsy to be gardening and you just can't stand it, you can scratch that itch with a late winter garden project. Make a seed tape. What is a seed tape? It's a perfectly spaced, pre-made seed product. Why make a seed tape? Two reasons. It ensures proper spacing of the veggie seeds in the row, and teaches children about math facts.

Here's how: Unroll a toilet paper roll about 5 or 6 feet and lay the sheet on your kitchen table. Or cut newspapers into long strips. Next read the seed package for spacing instructions. For example, instructions for green beans might be to space seeds three inches apart in the row. Place a drop of white glue every 3 inches down the length of the toilet paper sheet. Use a ruler to guide you. Then, place a seed on every drop of glue. Let the seed dry to the glue, and then roll it up.

You can make a seed tape for very small seeds as well, such as radish. This is helpful, because the common tendency is to overplant and crowd too many seeds in the row with smaller ones. When seeding time rolls around, all you have to do is take the edge of your hoe and make a furrow. The seed tape is all ready to be placed into the furrow and covered with soil. What could be easier?!!



## Sustainable Landscapes

Sustainable Nebraska landscapes minimize high maintenance turfgrass areas, utilize plant material for shade, wind protection, erosion control and beauty, and use native/adapted plant species to save on maintenance costs.

Native and adapted plants include those which:

- Are hardy to USDA hardiness zone 4 or 5 (depending on where you are located in the state.)
- Resist disease and insect pests to minimize pesticide use.
- Have deep root systems for maximum drought tolerance.
- Use existing soil fertility with low-input fertilizer applications.
- Tolerate Nebraska winters with periods of minimal snow cover, desiccating winds, temperature extremes, and winter warm spells.

### Create Diversity

Consider using all of the following types of plants in your acreage landscape

- Annuals for quick color and as a filler
- Perennials for long-term color
- Vines for twining and clinging interest
- Shrubs for outdoor family living space definition and environmental benefits
- Trees for shade, wind and snow protection, wildlife habitat, fruit and nut production, visual screening, and sound barriers

# Ants May Invade Homes in Springtime

By Keith Jarvi, UNL Extension Educator

Believe it or not, we are nearing the time when we will see ant and termite swarms in Nebraska. Ants swarming in and outside homes create concerns for homeowners that these winged insects are termites. While some ants do nest in the wood of homes, many ants do not. They are considered nuisance invaders.



**Identification** - Ants are recognized by three fairly distinct body sections, a thin “waist” and elbowed antenna. Termites are blackish gray and only have two distinct body sections with straight antenna. Swarming ants have 2 pairs of wings of unequal size, while swarming termites have wings of equal length.

Another identifying characteristic of some ants is a citrus or lemon-like odor when crushed. For more information, check out these Ant Identification Resources.

**Location** - Most ants nest in soil. They construct nests under logs, rocks, patio blocks, porches, concrete patios and more. They often excavate large amounts of soil as they build their nests. If the colony is under a concrete slab of a structure, the soil may continue to pile up.

Since most ant nests are in the soil and not in wood, caulking cracks or openings where ants may be entering the building is an effective management option. For ants swarming indoors, control with a vacuum or aerosol spray.

**Control** - Control of the ant colony involves locating and treating the nest with an insecticide. If you cannot locate and treat the nest yourself, contact a licensed pest control operator. Baits may not be effective for certain ants.

Some types of ants do nest in the wood of homes and may be present year round, although they are more active during warm months. Ant species that may live in Nebraska homes include crazy ants, odorous house ants, pavement ants, pharaoh ants, thief ants, and carpenter ants.

Spraying an insecticide to control the foraging workers of these ants may provide short-term control. For long term control, locating and destroying the nest is the best way to eliminate these ants. Ant baits can work if they are used correctly; although ant baits may not work as well with carpenter ants.

Unlike other home-inhabiting ants, carpenter ants cause structural damage to wood by tunneling and nesting inside wood. However, they rarely nest in sound wood, but most often invade wood that has become wet and started to decay. Preventing moisture problems is a key to preventing carpenter ant colonies in buildings.

For information on the identification and control of ants, call or bring ant samples to your local Extension office or refer to the insect link on the Lancaster County Extension website <http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest/ants.shtml>. If you have questions or are unsure of identification, bring specimens in to your local UNL Extension office.



# March Gardening Tips



■ If weeds occur in bulb beds do not remove them by cultivation. Pull them by hand so that the bulbs and roots will not be disturbed.

■ Some annuals, such as verbenas, snapdragons, and petunias, take 70 to 90 days to bloom. They should be started indoors in early spring or purchased as greenhouse grown transplants.



■ Buy some new perennials for your flower border. Spring is a good time to renew and add variety to your landscape.

■ Trees which bleed such as birch and maple should not be pruned until after their leaves are fully developed.

■ After pussy willow catkins have passed their prime, prune the plants drastically to encourage long branches and large catkins for next year.



■ Complete the pruning of shrubs, ornamental trees before growth starts, except for spring flowering shrubs. Prune those which bloom in spring as soon as they finish flowering.



■ Start transplants indoors of tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant.

■ Parsley is rich in vitamins A and C. Start some seeds indoors now for later transplanting to a sunny corner of the vegetable garden.

■ Don't plow your garden when the soil is wet. It will form clods which are difficult to break up and interfere with cultivation during the summer.

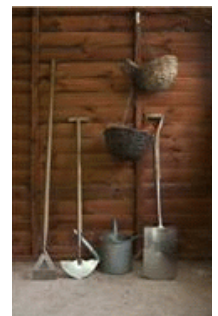
■ Plan your vegetable garden on a sheet of paper to utilize the space most efficiently. Remember to rotate the vegetables in the garden to reduce insect and disease problems.

■ Buy a notebook and use it to keep all your gardening information. List what you plant in the garden. Include the name of seed companies, plant name, variety, planting date, and harvest date. During the growing season keep notes on how well the plant does. If the variety is susceptible to disease, record what was used to treat any problems. All this information will be helpful in planning future gardens.



■ Pick a permanent spot for herbs in the garden. Many of them will come up year after year.

■ If you haven't done it already, check stored tools and outdoor furniture for signs of rust. Remove any surface rust with steel wool and paint with rust inhibitive paint.



■ Turn the compost pile.



■ Place birdhouses built this winter outdoors this month. Birds will begin looking for nesting sites soon.