Garden Party: Save time, energy, money by planning now

K-State’s Patton shares tips for getting ahead on spring, summer gardens

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Come spring and summer, the Big Three of many Kansas gardens are Tomatoes, Potatoes and Green Peppers.

But in the cold of January, Dennis Patton has a different list: Time, Energy and Money.

“This is the time to plan ahead,” said Patton, a horticultural agent with K-State Research and Extension’s office in Johnson County. “When we plan, we usually have better results in the spring.”

Experienced gardeners, Patton said, are keen to mail order catalogs or the Internet, eager to find varieties they know will perform well – saving time, energy and money -- in their home landscape.

Seed catalogs are popular for many reasons, not the least of which is that gardeners can choose varieties from the comfort of their own home. Patton notes catalogs also tend to have a wider variety of in-stock flowers and vegetables, compared to what’s available at local garden centers.

“But be careful,” he said. “The descriptions on those products often claim to have the latest and hottest varieties, but they may not be what works in our climate or in your yard.”

Patton said three sources tend to be pretty reliable when it comes to choosing seeds for the home garden: the state’s extension service, local nursery centers, or friends and neighbors.

“When it comes to vegetable gardening, my go-to source is the Kansas Garden Guide,” said Patton, who has 40-plus years of experience as a gardener. The Kansas Garden Guide is available online for free from the K-State Research and Extension bookstore, or for purchase at local extension offices.
“Whether you’re a novice or seasoned gardener, that is the vegetable gardening bible,” Patton said. “It includes a chart in the back of the publication indicating when to plant various vegetables, and when to harvest them.”

More tips for January garden planning include:

- Make a map of your garden. Patton says it not only will help you remember what you’ve planted – and where – but it can also lead to using limited space for 2 or 3 crops. “We call that the concept of succession planning,” he said. “For example, you may plant lettuce, radishes and spinach in March, then after they’re harvested in May, you can use that same space for peppers and tomatoes.”

- Start small. “It’s always easier to scale up then to scale back down,” Patton said. Ambitious gardeners sometimes begin with many crops only to find that weeding, watering, harvesting and other chores become overwhelming by May and June.

- Choose flowers that bring you joy. “I have a mantra that I tell people all the time: Life is too short for ugly plants,” Patton said. “If you don’t like something, or it’s not performing, get rid of it. You don’t have to keep it. If it doesn’t bring you joy, why have it in your garden?”

More information on gardening is available at local extension offices in Kansas. Also, the K-State Garden Hour airs online on the first Wednesday of each month, featuring timely topics presented by K-State Research and Extension horticulture experts.

### Sidebar:
**Are ‘pandemic gardeners’ sticking with it?**

Home gardening experienced a surge in popularity as people were encouraged to stay home during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two years later, they seem to be sticking with it.

“The research shows that between 50% to 75% of those who started gardening during the pandemic have stayed with it in some form or other,” said Dennis Patton, a horticultural agent with K-State Research and Extension’s office in Johnson County.

Many of those gardeners have chosen the hobby on a smaller scale, such as container gardening, patio gardens or raised bed gardens. “It’s not like the old Kansas farmstead garden that was a half acre when people would can and preserve food for the winter,” Patton said.

Gardeners today, he added, often are motivated by the ability to supplement home meals with fresh produce.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story


K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

K-State Garden Hour, https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/k-state-garden-hour-webinar-series/k_state_garden_hour.html

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