Kansas Garden Guide helps gardeners better manage state’s climate

Food systems expert says ‘Instagram Gardens’ not the norm in Kansas

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – She’s not meaning to throw shade to social media, but Rebecca McMahon knows that ‘Instagram Gardens’ aren’t likely to do well in Kansas’ climate.

“Many of those resources that you run across on Instagram are from the Pacific Northwest or the Northeast or even the Great Lakes region,” said McMahon, administrator of Kansas State University’s local foods systems program, who grew up in the cooler climate of northern Wisconsin.

“All of those places have much milder climates and much cooler summers than we have in Kansas, so it’s so critical to know what to plant and when in Kansas because the weather is going to fight back.”

McMahon is a co-author of the newest version of the Kansas Garden Guide, which was released this spring and available online from the K-State Research and Extension bookstore.

“The Kansas Garden Guide has been around a long time; in fact, I have a copy from 1983 that is about 22 pages and includes line drawings,” McMahon said. “I’ve even had folks tell me that they have versions from the 1970s and earlier. So, as with many things, every so often they need an update and some changes to better reflect the needs of the gardeners that use the guide.”

McMahon said the Kansas Garden Guide was last updated in 2010 with 76 pages. The 2023 version has expanded to 202 pages with full-color pictures and illustrations. The intent of the Kansas Garden Guide is to provide assistance specific to gardening in Kansas’ climate.
“I think one of the big changes is there’s a lot more emphasis in this guide on options for folks with smaller gardens, like we often see in our more urban settings… and accessible gardens for folks that either don't have space or the physical ability to have a large traditional type of garden,” McMahon said.

Much of the content is also published with new gardeners in mind, she adds.

“One of the things I noticed when I started looking at older versions of the guide is that there was this assumption that people had grown up as gardeners,” McMahon said. “But what we see anymore is that many of our gardeners are not coming to it with experience. Maybe their parents, grandparents or great grandparents didn’t grow up around the garden.”

McMahon said experienced gardeners also will benefit because “we’re always learning more.” She said one of the advancements in the past decade has been agriculture’s understanding of soil chemistry, including organic matter and soil biology.

In addition to horticulture experts, the Kansas Garden Guide includes updated information from K-State specialists in entomology, plant pathology, food safety and more.

Ordering information and a direct link to the guide is at www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/S51.pdf.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Local Foods Systems (Kansas State University), https://www.rrc.k-state.edu/localfoods/index.html

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