

## **A Cold Spring Causes Lawn and Garden Chaos**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

After several years of having warmer than average Aprils, we are seeing the other side of the coin with a cooler than normal April. A year ago trees were all leafed out and we were going around in shirt sleeves like it was Memorial Day weekend. This week we had frosts and freezes, snow flurries and the trees look closer to March 1 than May 1. So what's a gardener supposed to do?

The first thing to keep in mind is that this weather should be neither unexpected nor surprising. We are well within the historically normal April weather. We simply have become conditioned by a couple of warm springs to think that a warm spring is normal. When we plan garden chores and garden activities we have to use a blend of the calendar, long term history and attention to what Mother Nature is doing and telling us.

While plant growth is behind the last few years and perhaps even a little behind average, it won't take very many consecutive warm days to catch us up in a hurry. This is probably going to be one of those years when we go to work in the morning and it still seems like winter and we go home in the evening and it is instantly spring. We also need to remember that a cool and fairly damp April is no guarantee that May or the summer won't still be hot and dry. I hope not, but anything can happen!

But the delayed spring has also given us a little longer window of opportunity to get yard and garden tasks taken care of. Crabgrass has not started to grow yet. If you have not applied your crabgrass preventer, you still have time, but you'd better hurry. Most of the products need a few days, up to two weeks, to really become activated following a crabgrass application and a good rain or a timely irrigation. If you are just now applying your crabgrass preventer, apply a good watering if it doesn't rain within a couple of days. I would also lean towards using a preventer that has Dimension as this product will work on small crabgrass that has just germinated where most of the preventers won't.

If you wanted to get some cool weather garden crops planted, like potatoes, onion, or peas, hurry up and get them in the ground. They will still be at risk of a May heat spell, but the ground's still cool so give it a try. Many other garden crops can be planted now including most of our leafy vegetables and root vegetables (beets, carrots and turnips). But the cold weather has resulted in cold soil conditions and we are still too early, by at least 2 or 3 weeks, from planting tomatoes, peppers, sweet potatoes and other warm season crops. Still a little early for sweet corn, squash of any kind, and cucumbers. Wait until after the first of the May AND warmer weather.

Fruit trees may have gotten through the cold spells without getting nipped. Apricots and peaches are going to be at the greatest risk because they bloom earlier. Most of the apples and pears that I've seen have been holding tight enough bud that I think they made it through okay, at least so far. You need to keep on track with disease and insect control to make sure that if you do have fruit you have good quality fruit. If you wind up with a heavy fruit set, in spite of the weather, you will want to thin fruit later on this spring.

Like everyone else, I'm ready for spring to get here and stay. I know spring isn't as late as it may seem, but I'm ready none the less, for it to arrive in all its glory. In the meantime, take advantage of the delay and finish up some spring tasks that may still be in limbo!