Segment for Week of 5 April 2021

This is Julie Callahan bringing you information on Shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

I am almost afraid to say it, but it is beginning to look as though spring is here to stay. The Average Frost-Free Date falls between April 10th and the 21st with no freezing temperatures forecast for this week.

I recently spoke with someone who isn't satisfied with the way his garden is growing. The garden plants are growing well, but not producing much fruit. He said he had just finished spreading and working horse manure and four bags of lime into the soil. I asked if he had completed a soil test and he said he had never preformed one. Unfortunately, now is probably not a good time to have a soil test done because of all the freshly added material. This coming Fall will probably be a much better time for his soil test.

Master Gardeners do recommend regularly adding organic matter to garden soils. Well-composted organic matter is much preferred over relatively fresh manure that is usually mixed with stable bedding material. It should no longer look or smell like manure when added to garden soil. Master Gardeners never recommend adding lime to garden soil without having a soil test recommendation to guide the application. Most of our garden plants will perform best with a pH above 6.0 and below 7.0. Too much lime can raise the pH to levels so that nutrient availability becomes a problem. Too much manure can also be a problem especially with regular additions of commercial fertilizer such as 10-10-10. The best time to add manure that hasn't been well composted is in the fall so that soil microorganisms can be working on it all winter long, but make sure to have that soil test completed first to guide you.

A soil test will also indicate if your soil has adequate levels of phosphorus and potassium. The buildup of phosphorus in lawns, gardens, pastures and croplands can cause plants to grow poorly and even die. Excessive soil phosphorus reduces the plant's ability to take up required micronutrients, particularly iron and zinc, even when soil tests show there are adequate amounts of those nutrients in the soil. The primary risk of too much potassium is a nitrogen deficiency. This will stunt the growth of the plant and lead to chlorosis, a yellowing of the foliage that first appears on older growth lower on the stem. The veins on the leaves will have a red tint. Newer leaves will be smaller in size.

For answers to Gardening questions and more, call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361.