

Segment for Week of 12 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.

The weather forecast is still favorable for spring to continue; however, I am still not ready to set out my warm season vegetable plants such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplants because night temperatures are too close to 50 degrees to suit me. These vegetables are much happier with night time temperatures above 60 degrees. If you want to get a head start on your garden, after transplanting, place some black plastic around the bottom of the plants to really warm up the soil. You can also cover your plants at night with a floating row cover to help hold in the heat in the soil. A floating row cover is a white, light weight material that allows light and water to pass through while also holding the heat from the soil.

I recently spoke with someone who said they were going to go home and spread fertilizer on the yard before it rained. I said, depending on what kind of grass you are growing, you are either too late or too early. Cool season grasses, such as fescue that generally stay green all winter should be fertilized in October. While warm season grasses that brown in the winter such as Zoysia, St Augustine and Bermudagrass should be fertilized in May.

You may have the type of yard I have, a collection of white clover, warm season annual broadleaf weeds, dandelions and fescue grass which I would suggest you NEVER fertilize. These weeds grow too fast already and I shudder to think about what fertilizer might encourage.

As a reminder, I do not recommend applying ANY fertilizers to your lawn or gardens without first taking a soil sample and receiving a recommendation from a lab. 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.

Before I go, I would like to draw your attention to an upcoming event later this month. National Arbor Day will be celebrated in Cape Charles on Friday, April 30, in Strawberry Street Plaza, beginning at 1:00. Adults and children, alike, will learn how trees benefit homeowners, communities, and the world. They will have the opportunity to test their knowledge on the types of trees found on the Eastern Shore, including those that are native to our area. Members of the Cape Charles Tree Advisory Board and representatives from the Virginia Forestry Service and Northampton County Extension Service will be available to answer questions about what trees to plant and how to prune and care for existing trees. Using the map and guidance provided, individuals and families can go on a “scavenger hunt” to find some of the town’s most special trees.

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.