

Webinar to focus on rain garden care

OLATHE – Kansas State University’s Small Business Environmental Assistance Program will offer a free webinar on rain-garden maintenance from 10 to 11 a.m. next Tuesday, May 26.

The class is available to anyone with an Internet connection and computer speakers or a phone line.

Participants will hear from others who have installed rain gardens and learn about how the systems were installed, maintenance practices, preferred plants, challenges and results. Speakers will be Lee Skabelund, assistant professor in landscape architecture at K-State, and Sylvia Michaelis, infrastructure support manager with the Topeka Water Pollution Control Division.

To receive log-in instructions, register at www.sbeap.org and click on the link in the yellow box. For information, contact Ryan Hamel at (913) 715-7018 or (800) 578-8898 or rhamel@ksu.edu.

Mowing fescue short can create drought woes

MANHATTAN – Horticulturist Ward Upham says he has mixed feelings about the best way to answer this oft repeated question: “Should I mow my lawn pretty short in spring?”

“The only honest answer to that is ‘yes and no,’” said Upham, who heads the Master Gardener program for Kansas State University Research and Extension.

One reason he hesitates to endorse short-height springtime mowing is simple, but important to the survival of some lawns in the central United States, given the region’s often-stressful weather.

“Root depth and mowing height are related for such upright-growing turf grasses as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass,” he said. “Those are Kansas’ No. 1 and 2 favorite lawn turfs. The higher they’re cut, the deeper their root system will be.”

When cut short, these cool-season turf varieties must be watered well and often through summer. Otherwise, they’ll react to

the season’s heat and drought by going dormant, he said. If they have deep roots, however, their dormancy period will be shorter. In almost every case, the turf will survive, he added.

“At the same time, it doesn’t hurt to mow lower than normal height the first time or two, so long as you don’t ‘scalp’ any parts of your lawn,” Upham said. “As a matter of fact, that can speed green-up by removing the old, dead grass and allowing the soil to warm up faster. Setting your mowing height at 1 to 1 1/2 inches should be about right.”

For the rest of the season, however, the mower must go up to the tested, recommended mowing height – 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches high for tall fescue and 2 to 3 inches for Kentucky bluegrass.

“Most weed seeds – including crabgrass seed – must have light to germinate,” Upham said. “A high mowing height allows turf to shade the soil and curb its own weed pressure.”

Gardening has many benefits

WICHITA – Renewed interest in growing food can help to trim the food bill. The National Gardening Association estimates that a well-maintained food garden can yield an average return of \$500 per garden.

While beginning gardeners can expect some success, a Kansas State University horticulturist offers two words of caution: “Start small.”

“Springtime enthusiasm can wane in summer heat,” said Evelyn Neier, K-State Research and Extension state coordinator for the Junior Master Gardener Program.

Start with a small, 10x10-ft. plot or containers that will get six

to eight hours of summer sun, said Neier, who noted that nurturing an interest in and knowledge of gardening is as important as tending this summer’s crops.

“There’s more to it than saving money,” said Neier, who also counted convenience, being outdoors, picking a fresh tomato or sweet basil for just-picked flavor and quality, and the ability to provide part of a meal.

More information for beginning, intermediate and veteran gardeners is available at county and district K-State Research and Extension offices and on the Extension Web site: www.ksre.ksu.edu (click on “Lawn and Garden”).

Graduation Keepsake Edition Correction

An error in the Graduation Section published on May 14, 2009, listed the wrong names for the parents of Kirstie Strutt on Page 14. This correction can be cut out and pasted into your keepsake edition. The *Colby Free Press* wants to maintain an accurate record of our town. We apologize for this proofing/typing error.

KIRSTIE STRUTT



I plan on attending Washburn University, majoring in nursing.

Parents: Darvin and Tammi Strutt

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