

Perennials are up and ready to sell!

Unfortunately it's still too early to put them up on the display benches. We will be happy to get anything you want or you are welcome to wander the coldframes to your hearts content. There will still be more varieties yet to come in but if you need your first plant fix for the season, come on in!

**Blueberries, Red & Black Raspberries,
Rhubarb and
3 types of Seedless Grapes are available
now.
Asparagus will be available soon**

We are scheduling **Landscape Consultations** right now. Beckie will come out to your house and you can pick her brain for an hour about your yard. What to keep, what to get rid of. Planting bed design. What plants to plant. Pruning of all types of plants. Plant identification. The cost is \$50 for an hour. Give us a call at 724 836-2255

We are also scheduling programs for garden clubs and other groups for the remainder of the year. We have many topics for you to choose from. We also can do programs here at the garden center. It allows your members to wander around and ask lots of questions about the plants.

Don't forget, if you want to get your stamps on your green gift certificate card you must pay with cash or a check. We still take Master Card, Visa, Discover and debit cards but we can't give stamps for those sales.

Spring Planting

As gardeners, we all get over anxious when spring arrives. We want to get out there and start planting. For perennials, trees and shrubs, this is all right. Trees and shrubs can actually benefit from early planting because they have more time to get established before hot weather. Annuals are a different matter. Planting them too early can really set them back for the season.

Traditionally, planting of tender annuals and vegetables was never done until close to Memorial Day. This date is when we are almost guaranteed to be frost-free. We have had hard frosts in recent years on Memorial Day weekend. In years past, it was only close to this time that you could by tender plants. With the advent of the big retailer, these same plants are becoming available in April! People are unfortunately falling for this and buying their plants way too early. In many spring seasons, even mid-May is too early to be planting.

Most annuals do best when soil temperatures are 65-70 degrees. In soil temperatures less than this, they can have many problems. Basil, for example, is much more susceptible to diseases of the roots and stem. Almost all basil planted early will die. This is why we don't get ours ready for sale before mid-May. Roots of other plants may die from the cold, wet soil. This means that when the conditions become acceptable for growth, the plants have been set back. They will have to overcome the root loss before they are able to grow. So in reality, you may be further behind rather than getting a jump on the season. Cold soils also can cause nutrient deficiencies. Nutrients in the soil are less available to plants in cold soil. Leaves can turn yellow or purple, blooming can stop and plants can become stunted. This is especially true for tomatoes. Once again, the plants will have to overcome these problems before they can start to grow again.

Frosts or even just cool temperatures can cause many problems also. Annuals again grow best at 65 to 70 degree air temperatures. Even though you cover the plants to protect them from frosts, they can suffer damage that may not even be visible. You have the same problems that occur with cold soils.

So, you may think you are getting a jump on your spring planting but you may actually be further behind. If you feel that you have to purchase your plants early to get the best selection, do so. But keep them in a protected location. You may even have to bring them into a heated area if the temperatures are going to drop. Keep them fertilized so they stay healthy. If you still are having problems with them, you may have to pot them into larger containers to keep them happy.

If you can restrain yourself, it is better to wait until into May to buy & plant your annuals. You will probably be further ahead in the end.

You should have fresh chives coming up in your garden so I thought this would be a good recipe.

Mushroom and Chive Bisque

½ cup butter
2 cups fresh button mushrooms, sliced
¼ cup flour
¼ tsp. dry mustard
1 tsp. salt
2 cups chicken stock
2 cups heavy cream
¼ cup sherry wine (optional)
¼ cup finely chopped chives

Melt butter in large pot. Add mushrooms and saute until limp. Add flour, mustard and salt. Cook for 1 minute and then remove from heat. Gradually add chicken stock while stirring until well blended (use a whisk to prevent lumps). Return to heat and stir until thickened. Add cream, sherry and chives. Cook over low heat until hot. Serve with croutons. Makes 4-6 bowls.

Flowers and plants are silent presences; they nourish every sense but the ear. Mary Sarton

Start applying Deer and Rabbit Repellents now. The lush growth in your garden beats anything else they can find. You'll also train them to go elsewhere to eat

We will have Annuals, Herbs and Vegetables available by Mother's Day. If you would like them earlier, please read the article to the left! Our herb selection will be as good as always. We will also have lots of annual flowers. Our vegetable selection will increase this year again. We will have hybrid and heirloom tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and many squashes, cucumbers, etc. There will also be broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and brussel sprouts. Stop out and see us for your Spring plants.

Know yourself. Don't accept your dog's admiration as conclusive evidence that you are wonderful.

Preparing your Garden Soil

The most important thing you can do when putting in a new garden is to prepare the soil correctly. The clay soil that is prevalent in our area is very difficult to grow plants in. It stays very cold and wet in the spring and becomes similar to concrete in the summer when it dries out. Because of its very fine particle size, it packs down. This means that there are no air spaces in the soil which are essential to plant growth. Plants grown in containers are in loose, well-draining soil mixes. They have a hard time adjusting to clay soils. As a matter of fact, in some cases the plant roots will actually spiral in the planting hole as if it is in a pot. The plants continue to grow in the soil that is easy to push roots through rather than spread into the more tightly packed soil. To combat this problem, you must loosen up the soil. The best way to do this is by adding organic matter.

Organic matter is anything that used to be a living plant. Compost, peat moss, soil conditioner, fall leaves, grass clippings, mushroom manure or animal manure all constitute organic matter. By adding any of these to the soil, you open up the soil structure and make it drain better. It warms up earlier in the spring, takes up water better when dry and drains well in wet weather. Choosing which amendment to use depends on its availability and how much you need. How much you need depends on how poor your soil is. Apply several inches to your garden and turn it in to the top 12 inches of soil. See how much it improves the soil texture. If you feel it needs more, add it. If it seems fairly good, leave it for now. You can always add more organic matter by mixing it in every time you plant new plants or divide old ones. Also, nature will help you. The freeze and thaw cycle will cause mulch and other decaying matter to work into the soil. Insects, such as earthworms, will also move organic matter into the soil. And the more organic matter in your soil, the more earthworms you have.

Availability is going to be a big factor in what you use. Compost is a good amendment. If you make your own, that's great. If not, it is something that can be purchased in large quantities at some local nurseries. The same with mushroom manure. Peat moss is a good amendment, but can be expensive if you need a large amount. Only use the baled peat moss, not the peat humus. Peat humus is already broken down too much to be helpful. Soil conditioner is a composted bark and sand mix that is very effective in breaking up clay soil. We have sold it for years and our customer feedback has been extremely positive. Fall leaves and grass clippings can be added without composting if they are added to the soil at least 6 months before planting. Horse and cow manures are very good, but make sure they have been composted thoroughly or you will end up with a bumper crop of weeds.

You can never go wrong by getting your soil tested. It is a simple procedure through the Extension Service. Get a kit, follow the instructions and in a couple of weeks will get your results. They are very easy to understand. You will get both fertilizer and lime recommendations. Liming is very important and is an inexpensive way to improve your soil. Annuals, perennials, vegetables and lawns like a soil pH close to 7 or neutral. Lime will raise our normally acid pH to closer to neutral.

Be careful to not work your soil too early in the season when it is still wet. If you work wet soil, a lot of your hard work in amending your soil will be wasted. Working wet soil will compact it again. Also, don't overwork your soil. Rototilling it multiple times a year will also breakdown the soil structure again.

It is exceptionally important to prepare the soil correctly in the beginning. You will have much more success with your plants and gardening will be more pleasurable. If the soil is not prepared well to begin with, you will have to try to do it after the fact. This means trying to amend the soil between the plants at best or digging up the whole garden and starting all over. This is definitely the worst! Good soil preparation can mean the difference in having an beautiful, established garden in as little as 3 years or waiting much longer. Starting out right will give you years of gardening pleasure.

We have a good supply of **Soil Conditioner** in stock. It's great for breaking up clay soils and generally improving the "growability" of your soil. Mix it into new beds or work it in around existing plants. It also makes a really nice mulch. As the old timers used to say - "Don't plant a \$50 plant in a 50 cent hole!" Improve your soil!

Soil test kits are available at the Extension office on Donohoe Rd. for \$9.00. They are worth every penny. Know what's going on with your soil. It makes gardening a lot easier. Their phone is 724 837-1402.

Early Spring To-Do List

- Lime lawns and gardens
- Clean and sharpen tools
- Prepare new garden beds
- Start summer bulbs like cannas and dahlias in the house
- Start a compost pile
- Weed and trim up perennial, herb and shrub beds
- Clean up and repot houseplants and start to fertilize them again
- Prune roses when they start to sprout
- Evaluate your gardens. Decide what to add, move or get rid of.
- Start a gardening notebook. Don't count on your memory.
- Get your staking materials on your perennials before they get too big.
- Fertilize fall bulbs
- Label your perennial and herb gardens if you remember what you have.
- Divide or move perennials
- Start seeds
- Plant trees, shrubs, roses, perennials and fruits

You are probably out weeding your perennial, herb or shrub beds. After you get them weed free and before you mulch them, you may want to put down some **Organic Preen Weed Preventer**. It will help to keep the weed seeds from germinating, thus reducing future weeding. It is completely safe for pets and people.

We started carrying a new product last year that I think is great. It is **Biodegradable Paper Mulch**. It is made from recycled paper and looks like brown paper bag material. The absorbent paper will stop weeds and help retain moisture. It is recommended for around annuals and vegetables. At the end of the season it can be tilled into the soil. I think it also can be used in new perennial and shrub beds for the same purposes. Just mulch over it and let it eventually rot away. It comes in 3' 50' rolls.

Help Wanted

We are looking for part or full time employees for garden center/ greenhouse work which includes weeding, planting, watering and possibly waiting on customers. We are also looking for nursery workers. This includes mowing and trimming, moving plants, watering and loading. Stop out and fill out an application. 724 836-2255

Fertilize your fall bulbs now with a complete bulb food such as Bulb-Tone. Feeding your bulbs should help them come back year after year. Don't cut back bulb foliage until it has started to turn brown. Also don't pin it down or braid it. The bulbs need time to make and store food for next year.

