

Spring is finally here and the Greenhouses are bursting at the seams!

Huge selection of Vegetables

30+ varieties of Tomatoes including many heirloom

Sweet and Hot Peppers

Broccoli, Cauliflower, Kohlrabi, Kale, Cabbage,

Brussel Sprouts, Broccolini

Eggplant, Celery, Lettuce, Swiss Chard

Squash including 4 varieties of Zucchini,

Cucumbers, Watermelon, Cantaloupe

We have many types of compact veggies that are great for in pots. So if you don't want to plant a full garden, you can grow lots of different veggies on your deck or patio. It's always nice to pick something fresh off of your own plants.

Lots and Lots of Herbs and Scented Geraniums

We have our normal big selection of herbs both the common and less common varieties.

If you have grown herbs in the past, try a couple new kinds this year. If you have never grown your own herbs, give some a try. They are easy to grow and fun to use.

Annual Flowers and Hanging Baskets

We have a great selection of annuals and hanging baskets. So many that they don't even fit in the greenhouse. We can help you choose the best plants for your needs. We are also happy to plant up pots of annuals in your pot or one we have available here. Try out some new varieties this year. It's easy to get into a rut and plant the same things every year.

Don't be in a big hurry to plant your tender plants this year. It has been very wet. The soil has not had a chance to dry out and warm up. Wet soil is cold soil. Annuals, vegetables and annual herbs need 60° soil temperatures to flourish. Planting them in cold soil will damage the roots and really set back their growth. In some case the roots rot and the plant dies. This is why it drives me crazy when people say they want to plant way too early to "get a jump on the season." What really happens is that the plants can't grow in the cold soil and air temperatures so you actually are probably getting a later start in the end. The plants won't start really growing until it warms up but you've damaged them so they take longer to get going when it does warm up. A little patience goes a long way in gardening. You can't force plants to do what you want.

Perennials

Due to the cold, wet weather, the perennials are a little slow this year. We are just starting to get them out on display. If you are really interested in perennials, I would wait a week or so to come in. If you want the best selection, I would wait till closer to the end of May. By then the new arrivals should be getting ready too.

Tips for Growing Tomatoes

Tomatoes are the most commonly grown vegetables in home gardens. But this doesn't mean they are the easiest to grow. I get questions all season about tomato problems. The first thing I would suggest, especially if you are having problems, is to get a soil test. They are available through the Westmoreland County Cooperative Extension. It is important to have your soil pH correct. This affects nutrient uptake if it is not correct. Do a test and follow the recommendations and you should solve a lot of problems. If you don't do a test, at least mix a little lime in each hole as you plant. Some people used dried, crushed egg shells. Another tip that has been around forever is to put a Tbl. of Epsom salt in each hole. A lot of people swear by it.

A question I get a lot is about taking the suckers off the plants. I did some research and the consensus is to not do it. It reduces the amount of potential flowers and consequently fruit. It also reduces the leaf cover so sun scald becomes an issue. It seems that when comparing harvest from pruned and unpruned plants, there is not much difference or the unpruned ones did better. Try it both ways and see.

Blossom end rot is a constant problem. It is sometimes limited to the early season but can be an ongoing problem. It is related to calcium. This goes back to the soil test and having the correct pH and calcium. A short term solution is a product called RotStop. You spray it on the foliage and it is absorbed into the foliage. You can also put lime in the hole. Also keep the soil evenly moist. Don't over water but try to keep the soil moisture fairly even throughout the season. This will also help with cracking. This is really true of all vegetables. Anything that fruits will do better with even soil moisture.

Keep tomatoes fertilized. I like Tomato Tone when planted in the ground or even in pots. Organic fertilizers make your soil healthier. Tomatoes in pots can be fed with any food that you like. The key with tomatoes and any veggie is to not over feed. You will get too much green growth and less fruit. Look for a food with a low first number.

When planting tomatoes in pots, two things are important. The first is soil. Use a good soil-less mix. Don't use garden soil or top soil. They are too heavy. The second is pot size. Tomatoes get big. The smaller patio type varieties can go in a 12" pot. The big varieties need an 18" pot. If the pot is too small the tomato will not reach its full potential and give you little fruit. Also it will be almost impossible to keep it watered. It will dry out twice a day.

I wish pets lived longer, life wasn't so expensive, cake didn't make you fat and people weren't idiots.

Products to make gardening easier

Soil Moist – This is a granule that you mix into the soil that absorbs water that the plant can access when the soil gets dry. It really cuts down on watering and keeps plants healthier. I really like it for anything planted in pots. You can even put it in pre-potted plants like hanging baskets. Poke a stick into the soil in 4 or 5 places and drop a few granules in each hole. If you have an exceptionally dry spot in the ground that you have trouble growing things, this can be mixed into the ground. It lasts for 10 Years.

Classicote – This is a slow release fertilizer that is applied once a season. Put it on when you plant and it lasts 3-4 months. It is especially good for potted plants. It eliminates the need to remember to fertilize. I mainly use it on potted plants but I have customers that use it on everything, whether in pots or in the ground.

Paper Mulch – This is a great product and we are selling more every year. It is a roll of paper that is put down to smother weeds. The great part is that it breaks down after a season and can be worked into the soil as organic matter. It's wonderful for vegetables and annuals. You can mulch over it too. I like it for perennial beds also.

Natural Preen – Preen is a preemergent weed control. It stops weed seeds from germinating. It won't stop perennial weeds from coming up but it helps to stop those pesky annual weeds. The best way to use it is to thoroughly weed your garden and then apply it. We only sell the natural type so it is safe for all plants including vegetables and herbs. When used every 4 weeks, it will really cut down on your weeding.

Floating Row Cover – This is mainly a product for vegetable gardening. It is a spun bonded fabric that can be used to protect plants from cold early in the season and for insect control. It is placed over the plants either directly or supported in wire supports. It protects from deer, rabbits and insects. It can be left on all season on plants like beans that are self pollinating. Put it on squash, cucumbers etc. until they bloom. This will keep the cucumber beetles at bay long enough to get a good harvest. This is a very under used product that unfortunately not enough people know about.

Grow Thru Plant Supports – These are a round metal grid with legs that are put over perennials early in the season so that the plant grows up through the grid. The foliage then mostly hides the support and the plant looks natural. Unlike when we wait to stake until the plant falls over and we bundle it up with twine. They last for years.

Fruits

We have the best selections of fruits that we have ever had.

Ever bearing and June bearing Strawberries.

Red, Black and Gold Raspberries

Thornless Blackberries Blueberries

Concord, Himrod and Canadice Seedless Grapes

Elderberries Goji Berries

Chicago Hardy Figs

We also have Rhubarb and Asparagus

Soil and Container Gardening

You can't grow good plants in poor soil. Although good soil is probably more expensive the results are worth it. We recommend a good soil-less mix. They drain well and are naturally pretty sterile. These are what all commercial greenhouses use. We sell Espoma Organic Potting Mix in smaller bags. The best deal is the commercial potting mix that we use. It is \$24.00 for 2.8 cuft. This is what we use to plant everything. Anyone who has used it comes back for it again and again.

I do all my gardening in containers. Annuals, herbs and vegetables are all done in pots. Make sure you use big enough pots for what you are growing and use good soil. It really doesn't matter what kind of pots you use. Clay and plastic are interchangeable. The only difference is clay pots dry out faster. If watering is an issue, then use plastic pots. If you have really deep pots, fill the pot part way up with plastic bottles with the lids on, Styrofoam peanuts in zip bags or wadded up aluminum foil. Cover this with newspaper or cardboard and fill the rest with soil. A foot of soil for annuals is usually sufficient. If you have pots with soil from last year, empty the small pots and start over. You can remove part of the soil in big pots and add new. Old potting mix is good to add to compost piles or till into vegetable gardens. Keep your pots well-watered and well fed throughout the season. If a plant starts to look bad, pull it out and pop something else in. We have a nice selection of clay pots and plastic pots and window boxes.

Animal Repellants

It's time or maybe even past time to start using repellants again. It's really getting almost impossible to garden without using something to keep the critters away. We carry Liquid Fence for deer and rabbits. This is what we mainly use. We also carry Deer Scram. Repels-All lists a lot of animals. I don't know how well it works on all of them but we do have people that swear by it. Shake Away Fox Urine Granules is about the only thing that I have heard about that keeps groundhogs away. They are the toughest critter to keep out of the garden so it's worth a try. Most repellants work by training the animal to go elsewhere to eat. Sometimes you can get away with using them for a couple months and the animals change their habits. If not, you may have to use them all the time.

Moles

Moles are tough to get rid of. You can try repellants like Mole Scram. It makes their food taste bad so they go elsewhere. You spread it on your lawn. It is a temporary fix. It can be applied Spring And Fall. The best way to control moles is to eliminate their food source. The safest way to do this is Milky Spore. This is a safe biological product that only kills grubs. It is applied to the soil and spreads naturally to eliminate the grubs. It lasts for 10 years or more in the soil. This also gets rid of the Japanese beetles that come from the grubs. It also keeps skunks out of your yard because they feed on the grubs. It's an initial investment but it lasts for years.

Organic Fertilizers

We carry the Espoma line of organic fertilizers. They have been around since 1929. They have a food for every kind of plant. Organics are better for your soil. It gives the little soil organisms something to feed on when they break down the fertilizer. This makes your soil happier. Try some this year.

Labeling Gardens

Now is the time to label perennial and herb gardens. Label your existing plants and any new ones you add. If you are not sure what perennials you have, wait until they start to bloom. If you still don't know what they are, bring in a leaf, flower or picture for me to identify. We recommend the metal labels that we sell. When you write on them with a special pencil, they are fairly permanent. Permanent markers on plastic fade very quickly. Use china markers on plastic labels. It still is not permanent but lasts a little longer. The metal markers are surprisingly inexpensive, so you might as well use the best and most long-lasting. If you want to change the writing on it, you can use fine sandpaper or steel wool to remove the writing. They are virtually indestructible and should last forever.

Mulching

Mulch everything as you plant. Perennials, herbs, vegetables and annuals should all be mulched. Shredded hardwood mulch is my go-to. It's available in bags or bulk. Untreated grass clippings are good for vegetables. Mulches conserve soil moisture, regulate soil temperatures and reduce weeds.

To-Do List

- Keep annuals and perennials deadheaded so they will rebloom
- Weed – try to keep up so they don't have a chance to reseed
- Fertilize everything
- Mulch to keep down weeds and retain soil moisture
- Stake perennials before they flop
- Divide and move perennials as necessary as long as they aren't in bloom
- Trim flowering shrubs as soon as they are done blooming
- Watch for slug and insect damage – treat only if necessary
- Label Perennial and herb gardens
- Start a garden notebook
- Keep flowers trimmed off of herbs

Tips on Perennial Gardening

Don't keep buying the same plant. If you already have 6 or 8 of the same thing, try something new. The best gardens have a wide variety of plants.

Plant tall plants. In a multi row garden, the back row should be at least 3 to 4 feet tall or taller. You're not going to have a nice garden if the tallest plants are only 18 inches tall.

Always have some white flowers in bloom throughout the summer. White makes other colors look brighter. This is a hard sell. People look at white as boring. But if you look at a garden with white and one without, you will see the difference.

Plant a big enough garden that you can plant enough variety to get a good succession of bloom. Perennials are not a substitute for annuals in a small bed. Very few perennials flower all summer.

Should you plant in quantities of 3 or 5? If you have a very large area, this is fine. In large beds, a single plant may get lost. But in most gardens, variety may be better than quantity. If you have a garden that will hold 30 or 40 plants, even planting in threes will seriously limit your variety. It may be hard to keep the garden in bloom throughout the summer.

I get a lot of questions about one color gardens. They are not my cup of tea. Since it is your garden, do whatever makes you happy.

The biggest mistake made in perennial gardens is over planting. Remember perennials continue to get bigger. It takes most perennials 3 years to reach their full potential and more years until they need divided. If you plant them too close together, you will have to remove them or constantly divide them. Why make more work and spend unnecessary money. Plant them far enough apart to begin with. Perennial gardening is a great way to develop patience.

Slugs

With all the rain we have been getting and with more on the way, slugs are going to be bad this spring. The two safest ways to control slugs is beer or Sluggo. I don't like beer because it has to be done almost every day. Baits are applied every few weeks. Sluggo is an organic product and is safe for people and pets. It can be used around vegetables and herbs. The other slug baits on the market are extremely dangerous.

Beebalm Sugar Cookies

Beebalm is as good for cooking as it is for attracting bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 tbl. beebalm flowers and leaves, chopped
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2/3 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. lemon or orange zest
- 2 cups flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt

Combine eggs, oil, vanilla, zest, beebalm and sugar, stirring till well blended. Combine flour, baking powder and salt. Add to egg mixture. Stir well. Drop dough by teaspoonsful 2 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Flatten cookies with the greased bottom of a drinking glass that has been dipped in sugar. Bake at 400° for 8-10 minutes. Remove immediately from cookie sheets and cool on wire racks. Store in air tight containers.

Yield: 3 dozen cookies

Organic Pest Control

We have a large selection of organic products to treat insects and diseases. Always use the least toxic solution to the problem. Most other pesticides are carcinogens and nerve toxins. They are not safe for people or pets. They also kill bees and other pollinators, birds and other nonharmful critters. Diatomaceous earth is a safe way to take care of ants and earwigs. Insecticidal Soap kills most garden insects. Horticultural oil kills all stages of insects from eggs to adults. Copper fungicide takes care of most garden diseases.

Fertilizing Bulbs

Fertilizing your bulbs in the spring with Bulb Tone just as they finish blooming is the best time to do it. If you feed your bulbs every year, they will become perennial. You will need to eventually divide them like perennials. Generally they will stop blooming when they need divided. Dig them up in the spring after the leaves die. Take the bulbs apart and let them dry. Store them somewhere cool and dry till fall and replant them. Feed them with Bulb Tone.

Landscape Consultations

I am scheduling consultations. They are for 1 hour and the cost is \$50. You can ask me anything about your yard and gardens. 724 836-2255

Gardening Tools

There is a good selection of pruners, weeders and trowels in the shop. They are all of good quality. We don't stock cheapie tools. There is nothing more frustrating than having a tool break while you are trying to garden. I've tried them and I am hard on tools.

Garden Shop

Stop in and take a look around the shop. There are lots of neat garden items. We have stepping stones, statues, gazing balls, tools, bird feeders and other garden items. There are lots of neat pet items both for pets and their people.

Gardening Notebook

Start a notebook. It doesn't have to be fancy. Jot down the plants you are putting in this year. Make notes later in the year if you liked them or not. Did they have problems. Do things need divided or staked. Put new ideas down before you forget them. Keep it with your tools so you always have it with you.