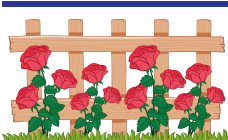


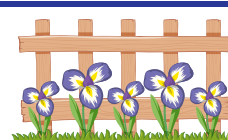
# SPRING



## HOME



## LAWN



April 19, 2025

THE MORNING SUN



## A different way of gardening

### Pittsburg resident uses straw bales for growing

By Antjea Wolff  
Awolff@morningsun.net

PITTSBURG, Kan. — Ten years ago, Pittsburg resident Alec Laverack clicked on an ad, discovered a different way to garden, never went back to standard gardening.

“I saw a picture on Facebook, and it’s two heads of cabbage growing in a straw bale,” he recalled. And my curiosity was piqued, so I clicked, and I had never clicked on an ad before on Facebook. And it was a guy selling a book called ‘Straw Bale Miracle Gardens.’ It was \$20, and it changed my life. I was hooked.”

After reading the book, Laverack started his garden with 10 bales of hay. As the years progressed he increased to two rows of 10 bales. He finally landed on putting the bales into an E shape and has over 30 bales.

One of the best benefits that Laverack enjoys about straw bale gardening is that he doesn’t have to pull weeds, since they don’t grow in the straw. The bales also extend the growth period for the plants. Last year, Laverack was able to pick and eat his first tomato in the third week of June.

“My mom always said, ‘if you’ve got tomatoes by the Fourth of July, you’re doing good,’” he said.

Laverack said the bales heat up faster which helps the roots.

In the bales, Laverack grows tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon, okra, potatoes, asparagus, sunflowers and more. He said people can grow pretty much anything in straw.

“Really the only limit is, you,” he said.

Each year, he breaks down the previous year’s bales, lets them dry and uses them in bins to grow potatoes and asparagus. He pointed out that it’s important to companion plant items. He uses marigolds and basil. He recommends only using

two tomato plants per bale.

Laverack has been dedicated to purchasing straw from Blue Ribbon Home and Garden for many years.

One of the only negative things about straw bale garden is that it can get pricey.

“I will say that it can get expensive really fast, depending on what you do,” he said. “It can be an expensive hobby, but at the same time, it can also be a cheap hobby. I think it’s therapeutic.”

Thousands of people across the country have started straw bale gardening and formed groups online for people to join and trade tips.

“It’s just a community of all over the country,” he said. “A lot of people have no idea what they’re doing and just looking for advice and that. That’s how it started for me.”

Laverack said that it’s not something people can jump into overnight but it would also be good for semi-beginner gardeners.

“Unfortunately, there is a process, and it does

take time,” he said. “It’s not an overnight, but you trust the process and take it easy, take it slow and it’s just a different way of gardening.”

Laverack has been gardening all his life but stopped briefly while he was in college at Pittsburg State University. When he started his own garden after college, he realized how much he had missed it.

“That first tomato I grew, I couldn’t believe how much I missed that taste of a homegrown tomato,” he said.

Laverack believes gardening is an important activity that more people should engage in.

“I truly believe that we as a society probably need to get back to gardening, growing some of our own food, just because we’re at that point in our lives where, things are getting a little bit more expensive,” he said.

*This reporting is made possible, in part, by the Support Local Journalism Project Fund. Learn more at: [southeastkansas.org/Localnews](https://southeastkansas.org/Localnews)*



## Local tree, shrub and plant tips for spring

Written by Antjea Wolff  
Tips provided by John Harrison, In the Garden

In the Garden Owner John Harrison is giving out tips to keep your trees and shrubs all year round.

- If it’s a blooming shrub, trim it after it’s done blooming. Otherwise, there’s a potential for trimming the next year’s blooms off.

- On most evergreens, don’t trim past where it’s green, or there will be a hole, or it will take a long time for it to become green again.

- Newly planted plants need an inch of water a

week. Typically, in the spring, it rains enough where you’re not having to water too much. But, summertime, and even fall, winter, sometimes it’s really dry, so watering is important during those times as well.

- Pick out plants from a reputable nursery. Big Box stores sometimes sell plants that aren’t cold hardy.

- Check the label to ensure proper care and positioning for sunlight.

Basic flower definitions

A perennial is a flower that comes back every year. They don’t typically bloom all summer long, because the plant

needs to store energy in its roots so that it can come back next year.

An annual blooms all summer long but will not come back the next year.

Native trees

So, you’ve cut down and uprooted the Callery Pear tree in your backyard. Now what? According to Harrison, Red Bud trees are a good native tree to plant. He also suggested Crab Apple trees.

Red buds come in a lot of different leaf colors, such as yellow, burgundy and green. There’s even one called flamethrower. With this tree, the leaves start off

orange, then transition to yellow and then burgundy. All three colors can be present at the same time, and it flowers like a normal red bud. There’s even red buds that weep, or droop.

It is good to note that in the summertime, the heat will bleach the leaves, so they won’t be as vibrant as they are in the spring.

Crab apples are another good tree, but typically when people hear crab apple, they think of a big, actual fruit. Currently there are hybridized new types are very small, so the trees are not messy. Harrison said these new crab ap-

ple trees only produce fruit the size of a pea, and the trees do not drop them easily.

According to Harrison, crab apple trees bloom heavier than red buds since crab apple blooms are bigger.

Both of those trees are good for the area.

Soil

Most of the soil in the area is clay-based, which can make growing plants a little more difficult. Because clay absorbs water, it can make the soil really wet and then very hard and dry in a few days. Some plants don’t like that because the clay-based soil doesn’t drain prop-

erly.

Harrison recommends people use Happy Frog soil conditioner. This product lifts the soil and helps it drain better. The condition contains bat guano and earthworm castings, which the plants respond well to.

Harrison said when he is doing landscape jobs, he uses it for everything. Although he recommends it to everyone who buys any type of plant, he especially recommends it for people who are buying trees. The condition won’t burn the plants and people can plant straight into it.



# Caring for your outdoor plants

Contributed by  
Danaya Baert,  
Deeply Rooted At Home

Having successful plants means proper preparation and continuous care. Here are some tips to see your outdoor plants thrive.

• **Prep Your Soil** – Healthy plants start with healthy soil. Mix in compost or aged manure to enrich the soil with nutrients and improve drainage.

• **Start with What Grows Well Locally (Zone 6b)** – In our zone (6b), focus on hardy perennials, cool-season veggies like lettuce and broccoli early on, and native plants that are well-suited to our temperature swings. These tend to need less water and maintenance and attract beneficial pollinators.

• **Mulch for Moisture and Weed Control** – A 2-3 inch layer of mulch helps retain moisture, suppresses weeds, and keeps roots cool as the days warm up.

• **Water Deeply, Not Daily** – Encourage deep root growth by watering less frequently but thoroughly. Early morning is best to avoid mildew and evaporation.

• **Prune with Purpose** – Trim back dead or damaged

branches, shape shrubs, and dead-head spent blooms to encourage more flowers and healthy growth.

• **Watch for Pests Early** – Spring pests like aphids and beetles show up quick. Spot-treat with insecticidal soap or neem oil before they get out of hand.

• **Add Flowers for Pollinators** – Mix in blooms like coneflowers, black-eyed Susans, or bee balm to attract bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds to your yard.

Match Plants to the Right Light

One of the biggest keys to outdoor plant success is putting the right plant in the right light. Full sun plants like lavender, tomatoes, and zinnias need 6+ hours of direct sunlight daily to thrive. Shade lovers such as hostas, ferns, and impatiens prefer dappled light or areas with morning sun and afternoon shade. For part-sun/part-shade spots, go for versatile choices like astilbe, coral bells, or coleus. Watch how sunlight moves through your yard before planting morning sun is gentler than harsh afternoon light, and your plants will thank you for the perfect placement.



# Popular trends in home exterior

Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends.

Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor. The following are some recent trends in home exteriors that have helped homeowners set their properties apart.

## WOOD

Natural wood has undeniable appeal, and it hasn't only found newfound devotion among home interior decorators. Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material. In addition to the garage door, natural wood entry doors and wood decks are popular ways to impart this classical, warm look to a home's exterior.

## PAINTED BRICK

Like natural wood, brick is a traditional material that's both sturdy and classical. But homeowners can add character to brick with a coat of paint, which has become a popular trend in recent years. Light tones tend to be most popular when painting bricks. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that this could prove a long-term commitment if homeowners so desire, as a properly painted brick exterior could last as long as 20 years.

## HARDSCAPING

Hardscaping isn't a new trend, but it has been trending

in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating natural stone into a landscape. Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

## OUTDOOR LIGHTING

It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying their properties outdoors would want more lighting outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

Home design trends tend to be fickle. But recognition of the current trends in exterior home design can set homes apart and turn properties into awe-inspiring places to enjoy the great outdoors.

# Variety of Spring Flavors

Contributed by  
Katherine Pinto,  
Wildcat Extension District

Although Kansas weather is somewhat unpredictable, spring seems to have sprung and will hopefully stay for the next several weeks. I plan to take advantage of the spring weather over the next few weeks and prepare my garden beds for seasonal produce.

Don't worry, you don't have to have a garden to enjoy the flavors of spring and summer produce. When fruits and vegetables are in season, they're more abundant, which means lower prices at the grocery store or farmers' market.

If you shop for seasonal produce, it will taste fresher, tastier, and packed with nutrients because it is picked at peak ripeness, not to mention that it typically comes at a cheaper cost.

In Kansas, April marks the beginning of the spring harvest season, bringing a variety of seasonal fresh vegetables to our tables.

Below is a list of produce that might be popping up around you soon:

- Asparagus- Begins mid-April and continues through early June
- Rhubarb- Available from mid to late June
- Radishes- Available from mid to late April
- Spinach- Begins appearing in mid to late April
- Lettuce- Starts mid to late April
- Arugula- Available mid to late April
- Scallions (Green Onions)- Begin mid to late April
- Mixed Salad Greens- Fresh greens become available mid to late April
- Strawberries- Early varieties may start appearing in late April with peak season in May and June.

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Chart 2. Bush Blooming Months						
Bushes		March	April	May	June	July
False Indigo						
Dogwood						
Plum	Shrub Types					
Cherry	Choke					
Sumac	Many					
Rose	Wild (Multiflora)					
Elderberry						
Buttonbush						
Lead Plant						
Salt Cedar	Shrub: Invasive					

Chart 1. Tree Blooming Months						
Trees		March	April	May	June	July
Maples	Many					
Pear	Callery & Others					
Redbud						
Ash	Green & White					
Crabapple	Many					
Cherry	Black & Others					
Locust	Honey & Black					
Paw Paw						
Oak	Many					
Catalpa						

# Summer Bloomers for Honeybee Stewards

Contributed by  
**James Cover,**  
Wildcat Extension District

A beautiful spring is here with all sorts of flowers eagerly waiting for the waves of pollinators who have been hibernating through the winter. There is plenty of pollen and nectar to go around in the spring, but soon, many perennials will close up their flowers, make their seeds and fruit, and prepare for the hot summer to come.

A hot, dry summer is not ideal for beekeeping, or really any native bee either. For many years, there has been a slump in honey production between the clovers of spring and the sunflowers of fall. The heat and dryness of the summer make it hard for flowers to be pollinated, so most species simply choose not to bloom during these months.

Honey production can slow considerably during this time. Honeybees spend more time collecting water to cool down the hive and have to visit more of a dwindling flower supply to bring home a load of nectar and pollen. While there are a few annual and perennial flowers that bloom in the summer's heat, these often require maintenance, reseeding, or space limitations.

Fortunately, there are a limited few trees and bush selections that do bloom during the summer. Having some of these in a landscape



can provide a bolstered food supply to not only honeybees but also the great number of other pollinators that might struggle in the summer.

Great sources for tree and bush selection information can be found at [Kansasnativeplants.com](http://Kansasnativeplants.com), K-State's Horticulture Info Center, and Kansas Forest Service websites. The included chart is most certainly not all the options but a list of possible ideas to get you thinking. An attempt was made to put them in chronological bloom order and adjust for this area. Of course, plants will bloom sooner or later depending on the weather of the season.

One of my favorite trees for pollinators is

the Linden Tree, also known as Basswood. There is actually a whole family of lindens within the genus *Tilia*. Native in the U.S., we have the American Linden (*Tilia americana*), but some European lindens grow well here too, like the Large Leaf Linden (*Tilia platyphyllos*) or the Little Leaf Linden (*Tilia cordata*). There are all kinds of crosses and named varieties, and all of them are great for pollinators. Most should bloom in June and July around here when other nectar sources start to run out. Note one native, the Carolina basswood (*Tilia via Caroliniana*), might not survive this far north.

There are a few

lindens in the urban landscape, but it is odd that there aren't considerably more. They are a fairly long-lived tree with a fantastic shape and look. They do well in most yard and park landscapes without much care. The basswood fruit is small and unobtrusive. When these trees bloom, expect a sweet scent and a great buzzing of pollinators of all types.

Another favorite of mine is the buttonbush. I can personally attest to the coolness of the buttonbush, having planted a row of them at my parent's farm, and we have some new ones planted at the Girard Extension office. They take a couple of years to get started but

then quickly grow to big spreading bushes in just a few years. Their flowers are fluffy white, perfectly spherical, inch-diameter balls that grow in bunches. Technically, it's a composite flower, but like no other.

Buttonbushes are native, growing along streambanks and marshes, and prefer moist locations. It will flower best in full sun but grows in some shade as well. Note that over time, this will become a multi-stemmed bush that can get 12' tall or more. Buttonbushes are available from the Kansas Forest Service in their spring sale.

There are plenty of other summer blooming options. Soapberry is good for some locations, but it prefers drier, rockier areas that are more common in the draws of native prairies. The silk tree or mimosa tree (*Albizia julibrissin*) is a commoner in eastern Kansas due to its puffy pink blooms. It's only excluded from the list because the blooms are better shaped for butterflies and hummingbirds and more difficult for bees, though they do try.

Lead plants are among a number of species

that could technically be considered a bush of the native prairie that blooms in the summer. However, it, like many prairie species, is acclimated to fire, is fairly low growing, and comes back from the crown each year. Other common bee-friendly summer bloomers you likely know about are crepe Myrtles, Magnolias, and Tulip Trees.

The golden rain tree and salt cedar (not a cedar or a conifer, even) are both considered invasive by many.

As you likely already know, the Callery pear is another included tree that is considered invasive. Soon, these will be banned from being sold in garden centers, and I don't think honeybees really like them anyway. While salt cedar grows in the alkaline soils of western Kansas, golden rain trees can be found as an unintentional invader to woodlots around urban areas in eastern Kansas.

For more information on trees, bushes, or any flowering plant, please give us a call at your local extension office. Also, check out [Kansas-forests.org](http://Kansas-forests.org) for Kansas Forest Service information.



Photo: [Kansasnativeplants.com](http://Kansasnativeplants.com)



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# Tips to make a yard less attractive to ticks

Backyards are ideal places to spend warm afternoons soaking up some sun. Lazy days in the yard are a big part of what makes warm weather seasons like spring and summer so appealing. But those afternoons can quickly go off the rails when an unwelcome visitor makes its presence known.

Ticks can be found throughout the world, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that only a select few types of ticks transmit bacteria, viruses and parasites, or pathogens, that cause diseases in people. But even if the number of tick species that transmit diseases to humans is relatively low, ticks that can infect humans are a notable threat. Such ticks carry pathogens that the CDC notes can cause a number of diseases, including Bourbon virus, Ehrlichiosis and, of course, Lyme disease, among others.

Human beings can come into contact with ticks in their own backyards. But humans can take various steps to make their lawns less welcoming to ticks.

- Cut your grass short and keep it that way. Black-legged ticks are transmitters of Lyme disease, which the CDC notes is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States. Lyme disease also poses a growing threat in Canada,



where data from the Public Health Agency indicates human-reported Lyme disease cases increased from 144 in 2009 to more than 2,100 in 2022. Black-legged ticks do not like environments that are dry and hot, so short grass makes lawns less attractive to this type of tick. Consumer Reports advises homeowners who have let their grass grow a little too high (around five or six inches) to bag their clippings when cutting the grass. Lots of clippings on the grass can provide a respite from the heat for black-legged ticks.

- Create a tick barrier if your property abuts woods. Woods provide a cover from summer heat that black-legged ticks crave. So properties that abut the woods may be more vulnerable to these unwanted guests than yards that do not border woodlands. A barrier of dry

mulch made of wood chips between a property and a bordering wooded area can help repel ticks, who won't want to settle in often dry, hot mulch beds.

- Plant with infestation prevention in mind. Some plants can help to repel ticks because they boast certain characteristics that ticks cannot tolerate. The fragrances, textures and oils of plants like garlic, mint, lavender, marigolds, and others create less welcoming conditions for ticks. Homeowners can speak with local garden centers for advice on tick-repellant plants that can thrive in their particular climate and on their properties.

- Remove yard debris. Piles of wood, leaves and brush can make for good conditions for ticks that transmit disease. After raking leaves and gathering brush, discard the resulting piles immediately.

# Gardening safety for seniors

Longer hours of daylight and warming temperatures are hallmarks of spring and each of these variables do much to contribute to the reputation of a season that's become synonymous with rejuvenation. After months spent confronting cold temperatures and huddling up indoors, people might find the welcoming conditions of spring irresistible, which compels many to spend more time outdoors.

There's no shortage of things to do outside in spring, and the season marks a perfect time to reestablish one's green thumb and get down and dirty in the garden. Gardening is a rewarding and healthy activity, though some, particularly seniors, may need to approach springtime sessions in the garden with a

heightened degree of caution. Seniors can keep these health and safety tips in mind as they celebrate the return of spring and what that means for their gardens.

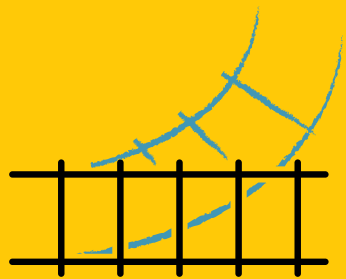
- Recognize that gardening is exercise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies gardening as a good form of exercise, and evidence supports the notion that gardening is a particularly beneficial form of physical activity. A 2024 meta-analysis published in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry indicated that individuals who engaged in low levels of leisure time physical activities such as gardening are likely to have a lower risk of stroke than peers who are sedentary. It's important to keep these findings in mind when

gardening, which is perhaps more physically demanding than some may recognize. Seniors can approach gardening just like they would other forms of exercise, taking the same precautions, such as stretching before and after each session and making a concerted effort to remain hydrated, while out in the garden.

- Incorporate rest into your garden routine. Rest is vital for anyone engaged in physical activity, including gardeners. Frequent breaks during gardening sessions can help avoid strains and sprains and provide opportunities to hydrate and get out of the sun. If possible, seniors can identify a shaded spot on their properties and place a bench there so they have somewhere to rest during gardening sessions.



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