

June 2017

Things to do This Month:

Manage nitrogen

- Nitrogen is essential for plants to perform photosynthesis
- Nitrogen is an abundant atmospheric gas but is not useable in this (N₂) form
- Must be transformed from N₂ to NO₃ or NH₄ for plants to use it
- However, N is unstable in the useable forms – it moves / changes rapidly
- The more rapidly it dissolves in water / volatilizes, the more likely it is to escape before the plants can use it.
- Take away for growers – either time N applications to crop need, or use slow release forms of N
- Organic options are compost, alfalfa meal, fish meal, blood meal, and feather meal. Notice that most of this are high protein types of things. Protein contains a lot of N
- Caution – too much animal or chemical based N can “burn” plants
- Rough estimate: 2 ounces of N per 100 ft² is enough for most vegetables
- The first of three numbers on a fertilizer bag will give you the percent of nitrogen in the bag
- For instance a 50# bag of 20-0-10 fertilizer contains 10 actual pounds of nitrogen

Prepare for fungal disease

- Fungal diseases can cause plants to wilt quickly, have gray or black spots, and result in reduced yield or even death of the plant
- Prevention is key – very difficult to control fungal diseases once they occur
- Select resistant varieties
- Use clean, non-infected seed
- Don't plant too densely so that there is good air flow
- Keep plants as healthy as possible through adequate sunlight, water, and nutrients
- Water in the early mornings so that plants can dry out
- If you've had fungal diseases in the past, consider a preventative spray. There are sprays based on copper, sulfur, certain bacteria, and plant oils that are safe to use
- In the fall, burn or bury diseased plants – don't compost them

In the Know:

The laying flock

- It's not too late to order chicks from a hatchery

- Chicks need to be kept very warm until they have their feathers, so now is actually a good time
- Before you start, make sure your zoning allows for the keeping of chickens
- To get eggs, you do not need a rooster
- Baby female chickens are pullets, baby males are cockerels. If you order “straight run” birds you will get a mix of males and females.
- Chicks need
 1. Warmth (trouble light, heat lamp) If too cold, they will huddle, if too warm, they will disperse to the corners
 2. absorbent bedding (straw, sawdust – important not to be slippery)
 3. protection from predators
 4. clean water (mason jar waters, gravity waterers, nipple waterers)
 5. food formulated for chicks (chick starter)
- Once they get their feathers (at about 3 weeks), they no longer need supplemental warmth
- Once they are 3 months old they can eat “layer mash”
- They should start laying eggs at 5 – 6 months of age
- Provide nesting boxes with straw for them to lay in
- During winter, they don’t need heat, but do need protection from wind and snow

Crop of the Month:

Strawberries

- Native to North America – who doesn’t like strawberry shortcake?!
- There are both June-bearing (one crop a year in June) and day neutral (bear throughout the summer) varieties
- Biggest challenge in growing them is getting them past late spring frosts. Mulch or floating row covers can help with this.
- If you want your plants to bear fruit for several years, pinch the blossoms while the plants are getting established. For June bearers, pinch every blossom you see the 1st year. For day neutrals, pinch all the blossoms for the first two months
- Mulch with straw to protect plants through the winter
- Leave straw in place until the plant begins to grow in the spring
- Keep straw or other covering handy to put back over plants when temperatures dip below freezing.
- The second year, the plants will bear a full crop.
- After fruiting, renovate the plants by cutting off the foliage (use a lawn mower set high and that has a catcher bag) and removing any runners that developed (a mini-tiller run along the side of the mother plants). Water and fertilize. If you do this every year, your planting can last you five years or more.

