

## What a Crazy Spring It's Been

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

On April 15, 1982 I was driving along I-70 on the south side of Junction City headed to Better Livestock Day in Abilene. The redbuds on the hillside north of the interstate were in full bloom at that time. It was my first year here and my first spring to experience redbuds in bloom. It was spectacular and I don't think the redbuds have bloomed that late since, until this year! I'm sure there were years that they were this late, but I just can't recall them right now.

Many people feel that we have had a very cold winter and spring when in reality, we've simply had a fairly normal winter and spring, at least where temperatures are concerned. What skews most folk's perception is that the past couple of winters and springs have been abnormally warm. We've forgotten what normal is. With that said, temperatures the first ten days of April were below average by nearly a third. So April has been cold. The past few days, though, were quite a bit above average. All of that is all well and good, but what does this mean for our home landscapes, specifically lawns, vegetable gardens, and ornamentals?

Starting with lawns, the good news is that if you haven't applied your crabgrass preventer yet, there's still time. The bad news is that because of how dry it is, if you have applied your crabgrass preventer, but you don't have an irrigation system that has been running, it hasn't been activated yet and you need to water it in. To truly activate a crabgrass preventer requires about a half inch of rain or irrigation. That doesn't matter if it was a granular product or a liquid product like many of the commercial applicators use. It still has to be watered into the soil to activate it. I'm doubtful that we'll get a lot of precipitation in the near term so if you do apply your crabgrass preventer, you better figure out a way to get it watered in to activate it. Of course, until it does rain, I doubt that any crabgrass is going to germinate and start growing!

Nothing says spring fever like a gardener trying to push the season by planting tender plants, like tomatoes, too early. Soil temperatures, a far better judge of when to plant than the calendar, have been on a roller coaster. They really chilled out last weekend, warmed up nicely mid to late week and are now taking another dive with cloudy cool weather. Potatoes that were planted on St. Patrick's Day may well be at risk of rotting in the ground. All you can do is wait and see. Remember that the last two years have not been normal spring weather years. Average last frost date is just about now, but frost free date is still about a month away. We have a good gardening calendar available at the Extension Office that is a very good guide to when you should be planting in your vegetable garden. And for the record, Mother's Day weekend is still a good target date for transplanting tomatoes and peppers.

For annual flowers (bedding plants) just follow the same advice as for tomatoes if what you want to plant is not frost hardy. Frost hardy plants, like pansies, could certainly be put out right now, but for those tender plants, wait until Mother's Day weekend. Many fruit trees, except for apricots and some peaches, that I've seen, including my own, have been holding fairly tight bud and I am hopeful that we still have a chance at some fruit. While many shade trees have been holding tight bud, and we haven't been seeing too much green yet, I think this will change rapidly over the second half of April.

So just remember that the weather we have been having isn't that abnormal. Remember to be patient. Spring is arriving slowly and the world will be much greener just about any day now!