

## Time to Plant Garden

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

The calendar page has turned to May. Temperatures are slowly warming. It's time to start getting those warm loving garden crops planted. Well, sort of. The gardening season typically gets started the latter half of March and early April. But that's for cool temperature crops like potatoes, onions, cabbage, peas, etc. Many gardeners are all about the warm temperature crops which includes all of the vine crops, green beans, peppers and especially tomatoes. Tomatoes are the #1 most popular home garden crop, being planted in an estimated 75% of all gardens. Even people that don't have a "real" garden may very well have a tomato plant or two in a pot!

May 1<sup>st</sup> basically signals the start of the warm temperature garden crop season. I know people who were buying tomatoes clear back in early March which is only about two months too early! In fact, even though we are into May, a little more patience may well be in order. But for many of our summer garden crops, May is the time to plant! Many of our warm temperature crops need soil temperatures of 60 or above before they are really happy. So this isn't JUST a calendar thing, it's a soil temperature thing as well. We are past our last AVERAGE frost date. But our frost free date is still about a week away. Even though afternoon soil temperatures are into the low 60s, morning soil temperatures are just a bit cooler than many of our crops like. Hence, waiting until the second week of May, or later, is possibly in order

Let's get into some specifics now. Beans; snap, green, wax, or lima, can be planted all though May and into early June. You can also plant snap beans in July for harvest in September and October. Cucumbers, melons of all kinds and summer squash (zucchini, yellow crookneck, etc.) can also be planted through the month of May. While you can buy transplants of these it really isn't necessary. They all grow quickly and easily with direct seeding!

If you are trying to grow the super sized pumpkins you need to get those going just as soon as possible as they need as long a season as possible. But for regular jack-o-lantern and pie pumpkins or for winter squash (acorn, butternut, Hubbard, etc.) you are better off to wait until mid June to plant these. These all are 80 to 105 days to maturity meaning that they'll be ripening by late September or October just in time for cooler weather storage and Halloween. It also means that you'll have less issues to deal with in regards to squash bugs. Sweet potatoes are a tropical vine and they don't like cold in the spring or cold in the fall. You really want to get soil temperatures up to around 70 before setting out your sweet potato slips, usually the latter half of May or early June.

Peppers, eggplant and tomatoes are all related species in the nightshade family. They are all species that tolerate heat very well but cold temperatures not very well. Tomatoes are probably the most sensitive to cold soils of all of these. Planted too early, tomatoes will literally turn purplish blue due to cold soil induced nutrient deficiencies. The nutrients are in the soil, the cold roots just can't take them up. Tomato plants that may have been ready to bloom when they were set out can literally be shocked back into vegetative growth phase meaning it'll take even longer to get those first tomatoes. I recommend waiting until Mother's Day or May 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>. I think this year it'll be even more important as we've had cooler soils this spring.

Yes, it's time to get those warm temperature loving vegetable crops planted. But be patient. You really have all month and don't have to get them all planted in the first few days of May!