

# Beautiful Flower Garden Begins With The Soil

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — If you're planning a flower garden this summer, start getting your soil in shape now. Soil preparation can save you time, labor and money as well as reward you with beautiful plants.

"Preparing the soil is the most important step in gardening," said Robert Nuss, professor of ornamental horticulture in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "Have your soil tested this spring, and use the test results and recommendations as a guide."

A soil test measures nutrient amounts and pH, or about two weeks. Results include levels of potassium, calcium, phosphorus and magnesium, along with the soil's pH. Also included are recommendations for the kinds and amounts of fertilizer to apply and how much lime — if any — to add to the soil.

"If you're planning to

grow rhododendron, azalea, laurel, or other plants that prefer acidic soil, you may need to apply a chemical such as sulfur, which lowers pH," said Nuss. "Apply no more than the recommended amount."

Till the recommended materials about 5 inches into the soil. While working the soil, remove stones, sod clumps, weeds and debris.

"Incorporate several inches of organic matter," said Nuss. "There's little danger of adding too much. Composted kitchen scraps, well-rotted manures, lawn clippings, and decayed plant material all are good forms of organic matter. They help retain water and supply some nutrients for all plants set into the soil."

Add 2 to 3 inches of organic mulch on top of the soil around your plants. Mulch helps keep soil moist, prevents erosion, discourages weeds, and builds up the soil's organic matter. "Mulch

also tends to be more attractive than bare soil in an ornamental garden," said Nuss. "It keeps mud from splashing on your flowers and gives the ground's surface uniform color and texture."

Several kinds of mulch are available at garden centers, including wood bark chips, shredded bark and peat. If you use grass clippings, leaves or well-decayed compost, periodically loosen them with a hand cultivator or hoe to prevent surface crusting.

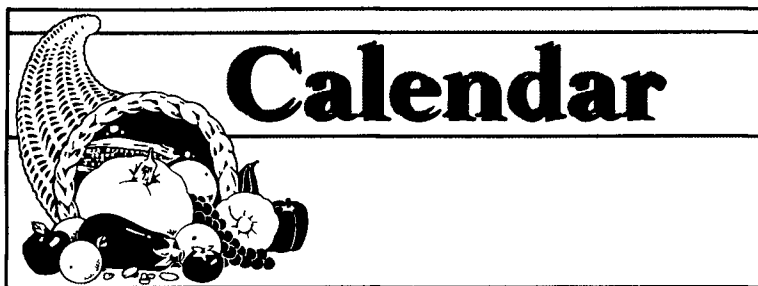
When your plants begin to flower, use a high-nitrogen fertilizer on the soil about 6 inches away from the base of each plant. Follow product application rates. This will enhance flowering and give plants a boost for the rest of the summer. "If you fertilize too soon, however, you will delay the plants' maturity and decrease the number of flowers," said Nuss. "Wait until the first flowers open."

Finally, retest your flower

garden's fertility and pH levels each year for several seasons. If reports remain similar, you can reduce sampling to every three to four years. "Nutrient levels and pH gradually change over time," said Nuss. "It's im-

portant to keep monitoring the soil to keep levels optimum."

Soil test kits may be purchased for \$6 at Penn State Cooperative Extension offices.



## Calendar

Saturday, May 20

Capitol Area Beekeepers Short Course On Basic Beekeeping, Milton Hershey Farm Conference Center and Apiary, Hershey, noon-5 p.m.

Saturday, June 24

Maryland Grape Growers Field Day, Bill Kirby Vineyard, Cordonva, Md.

Tuesday, July 18

State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania Summer Tour, starts at Strite's Orchard, 10 a.m., thru July 19.

Tuesday, August 15

Fruit and Vegetable Day, Rockspring.

Saturday, September 23

15th International Agricultural Plastics Congress and 29th National Agricultural Plastics Congress, Hershey, thru Sept. 26.

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Tuesday, January 30

Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Growers Convention, Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, Hershey, thru Feb. 1.

## Farmers' Market Celebrates 60th

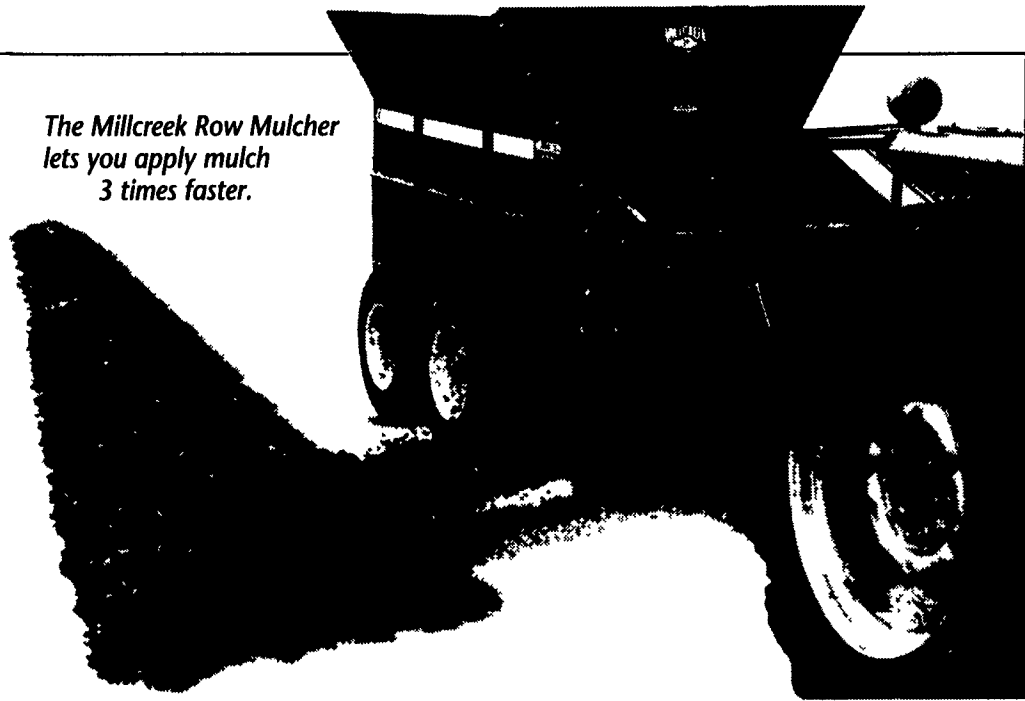
SCRANTON (Lackawanna Co.) — Co-Operative Farmers' Market recently celebrated its 60th anniversary here.

The market dates back to Aug. 1, 1939, with opening ceremonies at the Scranton Athletic Field parking lot (now Memorial

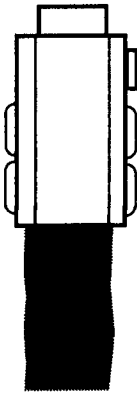
Stadium).

The cooperative expanded 10 years later, purchasing four acres from the city of Scranton itself. The market is the only seasonal market of its kind in northeastern Pennsylvania, noted the organizers. It is solely owned and operated by farmers.

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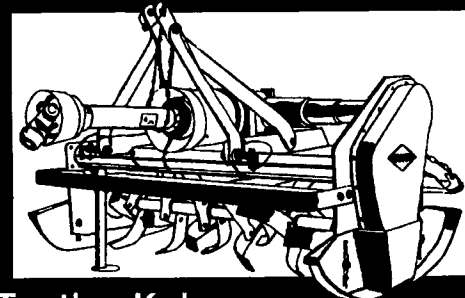
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