

Potato Planting Season Approaching

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With St Patrick's Day right around the corner, potato planting season is nearly upon us. While mid-March can be a good time to plant potatoes, keep in mind that you want the ground dry enough to work without causing clods and you want it warm enough so that the potato pieces will actually sprout and grow instead of rotting off! It looks like the weather is warming up nicely, finely, but don't be in such a hurry to get your potatoes planted that you create a muddy cloddy mess! Most of the time you buy whole seed potatoes that are not cut into pieces. You generally can cut most seed potatoes into four pieces, but make sure that each piece is between 1½ and 2 ounces so that you have enough energy for germination. And you should also make sure that there is at least one eye on each seed potato piece. It is a good idea to cut your seed potatoes at least 2 to 3 days before planting. You want to store them in a warm location after cutting so that the cut surfaces can suberize or toughen up to form a protective coating so they don't rot. Plant seed pieces a 2 to 3 inches deep and 8 to 12 inches apart in rows that are 36 inches apart. New potatoes always form ABOVE the seed potato piece so as the plants grow, you want to keep pulling more soil up around the base of the plants every few weeks as they are growing. Fertilize well with a balanced garden fertilizer 2 or 3 times during the growing season and keep them well watered especially if this drought doesn't break. But remember that potatoes are a cool weather crop so the sooner you can plant them the better. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Strawberry Mulch Removal

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I recently talked about setting out new strawberry plants and we are quickly coming up on that planting date. But what about removing mulch on existing beds? Most research has shown that straw mulch should be removed from strawberry plants when the soil temperature has risen above 40 degrees. Trust me that it isn't there yet. And in a mulched strawberry bed it will be a few more weeks before we get there. If I were to hazard a guess, I'd say late next week would be the time to remove the mulch, if we don't have a snow storm that is! Now, don't take that mulch too far away however. If we start to get early flower bud development and we have a forecast frost coming, we may want to get some mulch back over the plants for a day or two to protect the flowers. This regular moving of the mulch may be annoying, but it goes a long way towards improving your strawberry production. As we move then on through the spring continue to watch for frosts but once the plants start to grow you want to fertilize lightly with about a pound of 12-12-12 per 1,000 square feet of bed. You just want to stimulate a little bit of growth. The serious fertilizing will occur after harvest and again in the later summer to stimulate daughter plant development and then flower bud production. You can also apply a garden weed preventer to the strawberry bed shortly after mulch removal to help keep down weed competition. Most of these weed preventers need to be watered in so apply right before a forecast rain, or irrigate a couple of days after application if it doesn't rain. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Grafted Tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Tomatoes are always the most popular garden crop across the country. Surveys have shown that over 75% of all gardens have tomatoes and from my experience it's going to be more like 90%! Over the years we have gone through fads and phases. First it was hybrids with new disease resistance. Then high producing varieties that many people felt tasted like cardboard and then on, or rather back to, heirloom varieties that often had awesome taste and awesomely poor disease resistance. Well, get ready for the latest fad. If you haven't yet heard about it, you soon will. No, it isn't upside down tomatoes (which are a joke by the way) but it is grafted tomatoes. Highly disease resistant root stock is grafted onto any number of good flavor or high yielding tomato varieties that may not have very good soil borne disease resistance. For the heirloom tomato variety lover, this gives a chance to deal with soil borne diseases. Commercial growers are starting to do their own grafting and even locally, grafted tomatoes were available in the trade last year, at a price often over \$5 per plant! Here's the kicker, the disease resistance is against soil diseases that we honestly don't have a lot of trouble with here. Grafting won't do a thing for the foliar diseases that most home gardeners have problems with. Simply rotating your tomatoes around your garden will help take care of most soil borne disease issues. So, if you want to try grafted tomatoes, go right ahead. Just know that it's not going to help in August when the bottom leaves start to turn brown and die! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.