

Gardening With Chuck for March 18 - 24, 2013

Time to Garden!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay, we are past St. Patrick's Day which to me marks the start of the gardening season, in most years. Soil temperatures are slowly warming up but we are still talking about soil temps only in the mid 40s so we've got a ways to go yet for a lot of our garden crops. But those cold weather early season crops can start to be planted now as soil conditions allow. January and February we're wetter than normal so we need to make sure that your particular garden spot has dried out enough to be worked safely. How do you know if the soil is dry enough? Well, grab a handful of soil and squeeze it fairly tightly. If water comes out of the soil, it's too wet. If no water comes out, but it holds together for at least 30 second, it's too wet. If it forms up a loose ball and nearly immediately starts to fall apart, it's almost perfect! Naturally it's okay to plant potatoes now, in fact potatoes can be planted anytime from mid March to mid-April. I'd like it to be a little warmer, but I think they'll be okay. Other things that can be planted now - from transplants you can be setting out cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. From seed, lettuce, radish, peas and turnips. In about another week you can be setting out onions, both plants and sets, spinach and beets. Once we get into about the second week of April you can add collards, chard, carrots and a second round of lettuce. Then we have to hold off until the first of May for most of the rest of vegetable crops. Early in the season you want to keep the mulch off the garden so that the ground can warm up. There'll be time in late May or early June to mulch! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Rhubarb

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If you were to ask my mother what my favorite fruit is she would say without a doubt, rhubarb. Which is kind of ironic because technically it is a vegetable. But anyway, rhubarb is a popular plant that is always a signal of spring. It is very cold hardy and is fairly easy to grow as long as the soil has good drainage. Rhubarb does not like wet feet. Like most garden plants, rhubarb also prefers a soil pH that is slightly acid, which means that many of our gardens will need to have sulfur added periodically. Rhubarb is propagated from crowns or root sections. Each crown needs to contain one to two buds at planting. Plants should be 2 to 3 feet apart and if you are planting a large patch, put them in rows 4 to 5 feet apart, however I've seen very productive patches where the plants are simply on a 3 to 4 foot grid. I've always felt that you want them far enough apart to give them space, but close enough that they completely shade the soil to keep weeds down. If your soils are heavy add a lot of organic matter, rotted cow manure works great, and create mounds to plant in so that you will have better drainage. Plant the crowns so the buds are just ½ to 1 inch below the soil surface. Firm the soil and keep them watered. Varieties that seem to do well include Canada Red, Crimson Red, McDonald and Valentine. Like many of our perennial garden crops, rhubarb should not be harvested the first year. Wait until the second year to harvest and then harvest only lightly. By the time the plants are 3 years old, you should be able to do a full 6 to 8 week harvest, but let them rest! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cleaning up ornamental grasses

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Ornamental grasses, call them pampas grass or whatever, are gaining in popularity in home landscapes because they are attractive, easy to care for and tough! Clumps of grasses close to buildings are normally cut down in the fall because of the fire hazard, but most clumps are left standing until spring. Anytime in the next few weeks would be a good time to get these cut down. If you live in the country, the best way, quite frankly, is to just burn them off, assuming that the conditions are safe to do so and make sure that the grasses aren't so close to your mother in law's pine tree that you almost catch it on fire. Normally where we can't burn or burning just isn't appropriate, as per the afore mentioned pine tree, we cut them down to about 3 to 4 inches tall. Be forewarned that this dried vegetation can be very itchy if you get it in under your clothing. Pick a cold day so you've got long sleeves on. It can be very helpful if you can tie the vegetation up with twine to help hold it together also. It can then go in the trash or the burn pile. You can put it in the compost pile, but you will want to chop it up as fine as possible before so doing and mix it with soil or wet grass clippings when you start mowing. If the clumps are many years old you may find them forming a halo or crescent. If this is the case it may be time to dig up the grass clump, divide it and replant a smaller clump. Don't feel that you need to replant all of the old crowns, just toss the unused crowns in the trash or burn pile. Don't toss the old crowns in the compost pile though as they will start to grow! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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