

Last Tomatoes of the Season

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With the cold front that pushed through over the weekend it makes us realize that summer has really gone and there may not be much time left in this year's growing season. Like most gardeners, my tomato vines are still going strong but I know that many of the tomatoes that are on the vines aren't going to get ripe before cold weather kills the vines. As we get near that first frost, the best approach is to leave the tomatoes on the vines for as long as possible. Tomatoes CAN ripen off the vine, but they have to have reached a certain stage of maturity called the mature green stage. At this stage the fruit will be full sized, not yet showing any red or orange coloration but there should be a white star shaped zone on the bottom, or blossom end, of the green fruit. Once a frost has been forecast get on out to the garden and get the tomatoes harvested that are showing mostly red, a hint of red and then those that have reached the mature green stage. Bring them inside, wash them and sort them out. Any with bites taken out by insects or have flaws in the skin need to be set aside and used as soon as possible. Then place the tomatoes, in groups of the same maturity, in cardboard trays or cartons using layers of newspaper to separate the fruit if you have so much that you are sacking it. That way if any one fruit starts to leak juice or rot it won't affect the others. Store these at a temperature as close to 55 degrees as possible until they can ripen and you can use them. And if you have a lot of mature green tomatoes, sounds like a good time to make fried green tomatoes!

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Working Garden Soil in the Fall

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. While no-till farming is a great thing for crop production, it doesn't work so well for gardens! To minimize insect and disease problems, gardens need to be clean tilled each year. I like to move tomato vines into a burn pile - don't even put them in the compost bin. Everything else can get composted or simply tilled under. Doing this in the fall is preferable because then the plant tissues and the little disease organisms that might be on them can start to break down. Fall tillage also exposes insect eggs buried in the soil so that mother nature can destroy more of them. Grasshoppers lay their eggs in the soil and are one of the main pests we are trying to get rid of! Fall tillage is also a good way to get a jump on next year's gardening. If you wait until spring, you can get delayed because of snow melt or early spring rains that make it too wet to till. Soil in the fall is usually drier so it works up better. When soil is worked too wet it tends to become very cloddy especially with the high clay content soils that we have. If you work wet soil in the spring you will fight those clods all season long. That is no fun and makes a horrible seed bed. Even if you do work the soil a little wet in the fall and wind up with some clods, you have all that freezing and thawing during the winter to bring them down allowing the soil to mellow out. If you have a lot of weeds, grasses or garden crop residue out there, it is easier to deal with if you mow it down first. Fall tillage is also a great time to work organic matter into the soil, whether it's leaves, straw, hay or old silage. But that's the topic for tomorrow. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Amending Soils with Sand

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I talk about this all the time and people still keep asking me about it, so here we go again. With a few exceptions, most of our soils have a lot of clay in them. The clay content of the soil causes the soil to shrink and swell, a lot. It makes the soil hard to till and plant into. You say, clay particles are very small. They don't have a lot of air space, or what we call pore space, between them. If you work clay soils wet you can really compress them or compact them and then you have an even bigger mess. Heavy clay soils can actually hold the most water, but it goes into the soil slowly and it is hard for plants to get it out. Sandy soils on the other hand have large particle sizes with large pores between them. Water goes into sandy soils quickly but then a lot of it drains on through and sandy soils dry out very quickly. So some bright guys got the idea to add sand to clay soils to make them easier to work. Unfortunately, because of the soil physics involved here, it turns out that you need to replaced about 80% of the clay with sand to make a difference. Folks, it isn't very practical. In fact, adding just a little bit of sand, makes things worse. You can turn it from clay to concrete essentially. If you have heavy clay soils, heck if you have any garden soil, the best may to improve it is to add organic matter. As it breaks down the organic matter sits in between the clay particles and keeps them from sticking together. Anything, except sawdust, will work and the fall, right now, is the best time to do this. Apply as much organic matter to the surface as you can work in every single fall! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK,

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