

Fall Fertilization

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There is a strong inclination with most homeowners to worry about fertilizing their lawns in the spring, when we are applying crabgrass preventer. In reality, the time to fertilize or fescue and bluegrass lawns is really in the fall. The performance of those lawn grasses next spring is very dependent on the care we give them in the fall. Mid September is a great time to apply your first fall fertilization. Notice I said fertilization, not weed and feed! Most of those weeds we are trying to control with a weed control application aren't even growing yet, especially this year. The herbicide controls we use on those broadleaf weeds works on emerged and growing plants only. The weeds that come up after application of a weed and feed product are not going to be controlled. We need a little bit more cool weather and precipitation and then a few weeks to get the majority of those weed seeds germinated and growing. If you have been heavily watering your lawn there may be some weeds coming on, but still, many of them are waiting for a little more cool weather. So for that September fertilizer application, just use a straight fertilizer. In fact, those winterizer products would be perfect to apply now. I prefer to use weed and feed products in mid to late October. We rarely have had enough cold weather prior to November to stop weeds from growing and you will have far more of the weeds germinated and controllable by then. Now if you only want to fertilize once then wait until that weed and feed treatment time and do it then. As for spring fertilization, we'll talk later! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Core Aerating

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We have a lot of homeowners who feel compelled to power rake their yards. Power raking is a process whereby spinning knives or blades slice down through the lawn grass to pull up old dead thatch and vegetation. This is critical when thatch layers become over 3/4 of an inch thick. Quite honestly, I rarely run into lawns where thatch layers become that thick. Usually, if you are mowing regularly so you don't have a lot of grass that you are mowing off, the clippings break down fast enough that it isn't a problem. What I do see problems with quite regularly is high clay soils that are compacted. Compaction makes it difficult for roots to grow deep and it makes it tough for water to soak in. Compaction presses the soil particles together so that the voids between the particles become smaller and smaller making it harder for roots to grow and water to soak in. I would much rather see people core aerating lawns every 3 to 4 years. Certain lawns are going to be more prone to compaction. If you have a sprinkler system that you use regularly, if your lawn is mowed with a riding lawn mower, or you have lots of pet or foot traffic then you are at risk of having compaction. A core aerator has long hollow tubes that pulls plugs of soil out and leaves them on the soil surface. These plugs break down over the coming weeks. If you wait and fertilize right after core aerating, it also makes it easier for fertilizer to get into the soil. Core aerators can be rented from a garden equipment rental firm, but make sure it's a CORE aerator. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dividing Peonies

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A few weeks ago I talked about removing the year's growth from your peonies and mentioned in passing that fall was a good time to divide or reset peonies, but want to go into a little more detail on that. Peonies are very sensitive to soil depth over the crown. The buds that produce vegetative growth and flower development are easy to see in the fall on the crown of the plant. If these get deeper in the soil than 2 inches, the peonies won't bloom. Two quick ways to know if this is happening is if you have fewer and smaller flowers, or you have flower buds that start to develop and then they turn black and die. These are all indicators that the plant is too deep. I annually take a garden rake across the top of my peonies, in the dormant season of course, to remove any soil that has collected over the plant. Now, if your peonies are still blooming good and you don't want to move the plant or divide it, you don't have to do anything. Peonies can go for decades without needing to be separated, unlike daylilies or spring flowering bulbs. But if you want to move them, or provide new plants to friends or neighbors, the next six weeks is a great time to do that. Be forewarned that old established peony plants will have massive root systems and I mean bushel basket or bigger in size! When you dig one up make sure that you cut off root sections that have 3 or 4 good eyes or buds. Then when these root pieces are replanted, make sure that these eyes are set about one inch below the soil surface. Mix some starter fertilizer or bone meal in with the soil and water them well. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.