

Potato Planting Time? Maybe not yet

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We are rapidly approaching the traditional day to plant potatoes, St Patrick's Day. Personally, I think this is a stupid tradition and like I mentioned last week, in years like this St Patrick's Day may be way too early to be planting anything in the garden! Spring planting has to be the correct timing of air temperature, soil temperature, calendar and soil conditions. I gave you a few general guidelines but today let's starting getting specific. Before we start planting anything, even peas or potatoes, we need 9 a.m. soil temperatures to be at 50 or above for 4 days in a row. As of last week we were just in the low to mid 30s so we have a ways to go yet. Soil temperatures can fluctuate a lot from day to day this time of year and that's why I like to have 4 days running of 50 or above. Then I want to see a forecast that doesn't have consecutive days of below freezing temperatures. Then IF we are into the right average time of year, you can start planting your peas or potatoes or whatever other early season crops you grow assuming that the soil is dry enough. My simple check of that is to start making a row with a hoe. If the soil comes up nice and granular then you're good to go. If it comes up cloddy, wait for it to dry another day or two. Taking soil temperature is actually quite easy. Go to the hardware store in the cooking section and get one of those digital cooking thermometers. Put the battery in it, take it home and go out in your garden at 9 in the morning and stick the thermometer about 3 inches into the soil, wait a couple of minutes and read the display. Do this in a couple of spots to get an average! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.

Early Season Lawn Calendar

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There have been some years, in the not so distant past, when I was mowing my grass by now, or about to start. Some recent warm days has finally started getting the grass to green up a bit but it's probably going to be a few more days before lawnmowers start to hit the sod. Late winter, generally meaning now, March, is usually when we hit the wall of sick and tired of being inside all the time and really want to get out and do something. Unfortunately, this often means doing something that A) isn't recommended yet or B) isn't really necessary. The first thing that spring fever stricken homeowners do is get the lawnmower out, set the blade really low and go whack off the winter dead grass blades far lower than it should ever be cut. The desire is to get that old dead grass out of the way so that the lawn will appear to green up faster. There's a couple issues with this. First and foremost, while you will create an effect where it will take less new grass growth to give a green lawn appearance, you also create a situation where a late season cold snap, and remember we were just below zero at the start of March and we can still have single digit temperatures. The other thing that happens with low mowing is you expose more soil to the sunlight and invariably this brings on more weeds. If you have to be outside doing something, pick up branches that have fallen out of trees this winter, spot treat broadleaf weeds, do fertilization only but hold off on crabgrass preventers until later in the month or even April depending on which preventer you happen to be using. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Planting Blueberries? Don't!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Every single year I get numerous requests from people wanting to plant blueberries. My answer to them is always the same - DON'T! I love blueberries like many other people. The problem is that blueberries don't like Kansas weather. Here's the reality of the situation - there are blueberry varieties that can withstand lots of cold weather. These are suited for northern climates - these are called lowbush blueberries. Then there are blueberries that do well in the southern US, these are called Rabbiteye blueberries. And then there are the types of blueberries that can survive cold and heat - these are called highbush and are the kind that people try to grow in Kansas. So, yes, we can find varieties that will tolerate our weather. But the next three problems are the wind, the low humidity and the soil pH. Hot winds and low humidity is very tough on blueberries. They prefer high humidity and lower wind speeds. So you would have to provide a windbreak from the southwest summer winds. The bigger issue is the soil pH. Blueberries love acid soil and need to have a pH of 4.5 to 5.0. Most of our soils in this area of Kansas run 7 to 8 - way too high. Blueberries also like high organic matter well drained soils. Our soils tend to be medium to low organic matter and very poorly drained due to the clay content. It quite honestly can take 2 to 3 years of extensive soil modification to even get ready to plant blueberries. My recommendation is to simply buy blueberries at the grocery store or try to grow them in pots. To do that, give me a call for the details! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.