

Power Rake or Core Aerate?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Every year, both in the spring and fall I have a lot of homeowners asking if they need to power rake their yards. Here's the bottom line on power raking: 90% of it isn't needed. You power rake to reduce the thatch layer in your yard. If thatch is thicker than 3/4 of an inch it needs to be removed. Very few lawns that I've ever seen have more than 3/4 of an inch of thatch. By the way, thatch doesn't come from grass clippings, unless you let the grass get very tall. Thatch comes from a build up of lots of little surface roots that grass plants develop when you water just a little bit every day. The only part of the soil profile that has moisture is the surface so the plants develop a lot of little roots there and that is what causes thatch. Anyway, core aeration is something that over half the lawns in our area could use annually. In core aeration a machine moves over the soil and pulls plug of soil about 3 inches deep out of the surface. These plugs can just be left on the surface as they will crumble down very quickly under normal weathering conditions. Core aeration is like giving your lawn a breath of fresh air. We have a lot of clay in our soils. If our lawns are irrigated and then we use a riding lawn mower, the soil becomes compacted. Core aerating punches holes through that compaction allowing water and air and nutrients to move into the soil much more easily. March and early April is a good time to do this, as is September. And because aeration punches a hole in the soil and your crabgrass preventer, make sure you core aerate BEFORE you apply your crabgrass herbicide! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Get Ready for Asparagus Season

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Late March could also be called, get the asparagus bed ready for another year time. Before any more time gets away from you, get out and cut off all the old dead asparagus ferns from last year, if you haven't yet. Do not just go mow them off by the way. This leaves stubs and it scatters all the old foliage, that can harbor diseases all over the place. Cut it off at ground level and move it to the trash or into a burn pile. Assuming that the asparagus isn't yet showing itself above ground, you can control early season or overwintering weeds. A light tilling or hoeing, going no deeper than about one inch can eliminate weeds and help incorporate organic matter into the soil. Of if you don't want to do that, you can just spray over the entire bed with glyphosate, but just make sure no asparagus spears are showing. Then if you want, you can apply a preemergent herbicide, trifluralin is a common one that works well. Most of these need to be gently worked into the soil surface or activated with rainfall or irrigation. After the harvest season we also have some additional herbicide options but we'll deal with those in late May or June! The last or the next to the last thing you should do is fertilize your asparagus. Apply 2 pounds of a general garden fertilizer per 20 foot of row or roughly 60 square feet. You can use a 10-20-10 or a triple 12 or triple 13. Asparagus is a heavy feeder. If you want you can also apply a mulch layer at this time. A mulch layer will help reduce weed competition and the asparagus will just punch right up through it with no problem. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Strawberry Planting and 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. When you mention fruit production to most home gardeners, they are liable to think apples or cherries or peaches. But in reality, our most reliable producing fruit is strawberries. Strawberries are vigorous growers and heavy producers even under our challenging Kansas conditions. Like all fruit crops, you aren't going to get fruit the first year you plant them. But unlike many of the crops, especially the fruit trees, you will get fruit the second year. Here in northern Kansas we plant strawberries in late March and early April. These mother plants develop a strong root system in the cool weather of April and May. Then later in the year the mother plants produce daughter plants, on runners. These daughter plants are what will produce the fruit crop the following year. Since you want to make sure your mother plants develop a strong root system the first year, you need to remove all the flowers this first year. This tears up some gardeners and I can appreciate that, but just remember that you are sacrificing a little fruit this year to get a lot of fruit next year! We do have a good bulletin on strawberry production so stop by the Extension Office to pick up a copy. Now, for those of you who mulched your strawberries last fall, it's time to get that mulch off. Research has shown that straw mulch should be removed when soil temperatures have reached about 40 degrees, which is now. If the mulch is left on too long after that fruit production will be reduced. What many gardeners do though is to keep the mulch between the rows so they can use it in case of a late frost! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.