

Itch Mites

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'm always looking for new experiences. Life is a journey, not a destination and new experiences make the trip more interesting. This new experience certainly was a learning experience, I'd just as soon not have to deal with it again. I learned about oak leaf itch mites, which I'm just going to call itch mites. The itch mites are most commonly associated with late summer and fall. The mites don't really want to feed on people, they feed on other small insects, the ones that make galls on oak leaves. The itch mite feeds on the gall insect or immature midge. Our oak trees had a lot of these galls this year. The itch mite has a one week life cycle and when they emerge they can fall off leaves onto anything below them or even crawl up clothing from the ground. Unlike chiggers, another mite, that love to feed under tight fitting clothing, the itch mite generally bites on the upper half of the body often under loose fitting clothing. Itch mites don't feed on humans, but will bite and then move on. In about 10 to 16 hours the bite will develop a red welt and here's where they are different from chiggers. The welt will have a tiny blister in the center and when you itch the welt, it hurts. My welt went away in about 3 or 4 days and it was on my upper arm. There's no way to stop the mites and no way to prevent them from biting. If you get bit up, and you have oak trees in your yard, stay out of the yard for a couple of weeks. With cooler weather they should be slowing down and they may not be back next year, but now if that welt itches, but hurts, you know why! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Soil Testing

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One of the most important things to know about your yard, flower bed or garden is what the soil pH is and what the nutrient levels are. The only way to do this properly is with a soil test and fall is a great time to do that soil test. You want to do this in the fall so you can start making applications of nutrients, lime or sulfur now so it has the winter to start working. You want to make a composite sample. If your yard is small and uniform, you can do it with one composite sample. If the yard is big or has a lot of variability you may want to do the front yard different from the back yard, etc. Basically go around to 6 to 10 different spots around the yard or garden and take a trowel full of dirt, from the top 6 inches and put it into a bucket. Once you get all these trowels full of dirt in your bucket mix it up really good and take out enough of a sub sample to fill a one pound butter tub or basically one pint. Bring that into the Extension Office and we'll send it over to the K-State Soils Lab. The cost for a test is \$15 and we'll get soil pH, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium from that sample. From this we can often see why gardens or lawns aren't performing like they want. Sometimes homeowners, especially new homeowners want tests run for pesticides. That is something that the soil lab at K-State can not do. These are very different tests and much more expensive. IF you want these tests run you also have to know exactly what pesticides you want tested for as each pesticide has different requirements. If you have concerns about these then we need to talk one on one. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

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. We used to call them all pampas grasses, but we have so many different types now days, we call them ornamental grasses. Most of these ornamental grasses are warm season grasses and they are slowing down growth now, in fact in a few more weeks they will be dormant. Which always brings up the question of what to do with them over the winter. If they are away from the house then you can chose to cut them down this fall or wait until next spring. But if they are next to the house I would cut them down now because once they become totally dried out they are very flammable! I personally like to cut them down in the fall on a fairly cold day. You see, the dust from these grasses tends to be very itchy and annoying. If you cut them down on a warm day and wear short sleeves, you will regret it by that evening. Put on long sleeves, gloves and even a hooded sweatshirt and keep working up wind. Cut them down and get them off. It is sometimes helpful to tie the leaves and seed stalks together with heavy twine and then cut through them with a sharp pruning shear. The twine will help keep everything together, not blowing around. I like to cut them down to about a six inch height. Then next spring, IF you live out in the country, you can burn the remainder off to give a nice clean look as they green up. If the clumps have gotten quite large you may need to divide them. Of if you want to simply have more, then you can dig them up and split them apart. But since the are warm season grasses this is best done in mid to late April as the grasses start to grow. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.