

Mushrooms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If it rains very much in August or early September, there will be mushrooms. Sometimes large circles of large mushrooms called fairy rings. Sometimes just a few various sized mushrooms popping up here and there in a yard. Sometimes just a nice line of mushrooms popping up in the lawn. Regardless of where they are and what they look like, there isn't a darn thing you can do about them. Here's why. Mushrooms (or toadstools if you prefer to call them that) are the fruiting body of a larger fungus organism. The fungus itself is living on decaying organic matter. It may be grass roots in the prairie, but in most yards it's old tree roots. The fungus is feeding on the old wood, breaking it down to base nutrients. When the weather conditions are right - usually inferring warmth and moisture - the fungus can very quickly develop a crop of mushrooms. They come through the ground and soon release spores, which are tiny little grains of inoculum that float through the air, landing somewhere to start a new fungus colony. The fungus organism can be as much as 2 to 3 feet below ground. Over time, it uses up its food supply and dies or becomes dormant. But there's no way to stop the fungus from producing mushrooms. Ultimately it's beneficial and you can often see darker green grass near the mushrooms as the wood decomposition releases nitrogen into the soil. Yes, some of these mushrooms are edible, some are delicacies, but don't ask me to identify them for you. If they bother you, mow them off or kick them over. The next rain will just bring more! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Watering New Lawns

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We already have had a lot of new grass seed go in the ground. If I'd have known we were going to get those nice rains at the start of the month, I would have been out in that heat the last week of August planting seed myself! But we can't always depend on mother nature to bring us the regular timely rains that we really need in early September to get new grass seed germinated and growing. The way we irrigate a new planting of grass is, or should be, vastly different than the way we water established turfgrass. New grass seed isn't planted very deep - usually ½ inch or less. So it doesn't take much water to get that top inch of soil wet, but on the other hand warm and windy weather will also dry out that zone very quickly. Once a grass seed starts to germinate, it has to stay moist. If it dries out, it will die. You can wait until a wet period comes along and hope that natural rain will get the grass up and growing, but in reality you want that grass up and growing as quick as possible so that it can get well established before cold weather sets in. Because of those same winds, I'm not that big of a fan of using straw mulch to keep the soil wet. If daytime highs are above 80 and especially if it is windy, plan to water morning and evening and maybe even mid day to keep the top inch of soil moist. If it is below 80 degrees and cloudy, you can get by with watering once a day. But you don't need to flood the soil, just keep the surface moist. After the grass starts to grow and gets established then we will start watering less often, but watering longer. Unless of course it rains!

This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fall Fertilization Basics

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Assuming that like most of us, you have tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass, what we commonly call cool season grasses, then the next 60 days are critical for the health and well being of your yard. First of all, keep mowing that grass tall! 3 to 3½ inches. These grasses are going into a major growth phase. Rain and cooler weather is much to their liking and they can really thicken up over the next two months. Fertilizing in the fall is perhaps the most crucial thing you can do to improve your lawn, other than the aforementioned mowing tall thing! Fertilizing your lawn now encourages development of all those below ground plant parts that make for a thicker and healthier lawn with a deeper root system. The best way to have an early greening up lawn that is a nice deep green is with fall fertilization, not spring fertilization. In fact going with heavy spring fertilizing primarily just makes you mow more often! The principle nutrient that your lawn needs is nitrogen UNLESS you have done a soil test and know that you have a phosphorus deficiency. Most of the time the general lawn fertilizers, like a 27-3-3 is going to be just fine. You want to apply your first fall fertilization now, but don't be using a weed and feed product. The weed control products need to wait until mid to late October. The weeds we want to control are just now starting to sprout and grow. If you apply the weed and feed too soon, you'll have an entire second crop coming along later this month and early October. Fertilize now, weed and feed in the last half of October. And continue to mow tall! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.