

Fertilizing Spring Flowering Bulbs

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 traditionally thought about fertilizing spring flowering bulbs when they are blooming or just after blooming. And as is often the case with traditions, it's wrong. At that time, the spring flowering bulb plant is slowing down and getting ready to go dormant. It has NO interest in utilizing fertilizer. Now, a bulb plant is actively growing once the new foliage appears above ground in the spring. Granted, you still need to leave that foliage on until it dies down naturally on it's own, but get the fertilizer on just as soon as you see those first green shoots breaking the soil surface. Once the bulb starts to flower, the roots are in the process of dying. So we need to get that fertilizer down when the roots are active, which is when the leaves move above the soil surface. Unless you know that you have high phosphorus and potassium levels, use a balanced fertilizer like a 10-10-10 at the rate of 2.5 pounds per 100 square feet. This works out to be one nicely rounded teaspoon per square foot. If you have been fertilizing your bulbs but for the past several years the flowers are becoming fewer and smaller, then fertilization isn't the issue. This is often an indication that the bulbs need to be dug up, separated and replanted in the fall. Bulbs naturally multiply from one year to the next. Over time this clump of bulbs can get crowded to the point that none are growing very well. Dig the bulbs up as the leaves are dying down, separate the bulbs and if you want, sort them by size, and then store them away in a cool dry place until October when it's time to plant them. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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Soil Temperatures

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 problems that many gardeners run in to is they spend too much time calendar watching. Now don't get me wrong, the calendar is important, but it's not the only thing to pay attention to. The other parts of the equation are the current conditions, weather forecasts and perhaps most important is the soil temperature. Many gardeners feel that they have to have potatoes planted on St Patrick's Day. I'm not sure where this comes from other than we call them Irish Potatoes and St Patrick is Irish. Wellllll, potatoes originated in South America. While we say that mid March is when we can START planting potatoes, it doesn't mean we HAVE to plant them in mid March. If it's March 17th, and the soil temperature is 40 degrees, what I'd consider the minimum for planting potatoes, and the forecast is for a week of cold rainy conditions or even snow, don't plant! So if you don't have one yet, get a soil thermometer. I find one of the digital cooking thermometers with a 4½ inch probe to work very well for a soil thermometer. Take the temperature at 2.5 inches deep between 10 and 11 in the morning. Do this for several days in a row to find out what the average soil temperature is doing and this can be a good indicator of when it's time to plant certain crops. 40 degrees is the minimum and is what I recommend for peas and potatoes. Other early spring crops like lettuce, parsnips, radish and spinach need 45 degrees. So this spring, keep one eye on the calendar and the other eye on the thermometer. Between the two, you'll probably stay out of trouble in your garden! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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Milkweeds for Monarchs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Monarch butterflies are recognized by everyone. But in recent years, like the last 20, their populations have been dropping to concerningly low levels. Much of this population loss has to do with loss of habitat, somewhat loss of nectar sources for the adults, but more specifically, loss of larval food plants. While the adult monarch can sip nectar from almost any blooming plant, the monarch caterpillars need milkweeds. Most of us know the classic common milkweed, but did you realize that we have over a dozen milkweed species that are native to the northern Flint Hills. Of those, about a half dozen are recommended for monarch caterpillars. And of those half dozen, I personally have had good luck growing at least three of them, Common, Swamp and Butterfly Milkweed. Seed and plants of all of these are available either at nurseries or from mail order sources. These are all perennial plants that as mature plants do not transplant well. So buy young plants, don't try to dig them up from the pasture or field and transplant them. These are also plants, like many of our native perennial forbs, that are best suited to full sun - so don't stick them under a tree! Also, like many flowering plants, the bigger the planting, the more attractive it will be to the female butterflies to lay eggs. But once you plant these larval food sources, remember it's a no insecticide zone for pretty obvious reasons. If you would like more information on growing milkweeds for monarchs or need some help in finding a source for plants or seeds, please give me a call at the Extension Office. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.