

Potatoes and Peas

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Two of the earliest crops that we traditionally plant in our vegetable gardens are peas and potatoes. With that in mind, also be aware that lettuce, turnips and broccoli can be planted at about the same time. The old Swedes in my home town always said that for peas to be good they needed to be planted early and deep. I would suggest planting peas around mid March and get them about 2 inches deep. It may seem deep, but they can handle it! I would also encourage you to make sure that the seeds have been inoculated with nitrogen fixing bacteria. These are the little microbes that exist symbiotically with the roots and allow legumes to make their own nitrogen. Fortunately, peas do fine in higher pH soils so long as we don't have a late cold snap to freeze them out or it gets too hot too early. Potatoes also go in early and deep - 2 to 3 inches deep, and are somewhat picky about their soil - pay attention to tomorrow's program. One issue with potatoes is that when planted in high pH soil they will tend to develop scab which are lesions on the skin caused by bacteria. In acid soils, below pH 6, the bacteria doesn't do well so lowering the pH will help. For the gardens with higher pH soils we have some potato varieties available that have good scab tolerance. The varieties Norland, Red Pontiac, Norgold Russet and Norkotah have good scab tolerance. Superior, Norchip, LaRouge and La Soda have moderate tolerance, but two of our long time favorites, Kennebec and Irish Cobbler have poor scab tolerance and are very susceptible to scab so try to avoid these varieties. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Soil testing for the potato patch

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Gardeners really like to grow potatoes. I really like to grow potatoes. Unfortunately, potatoes don't really like most of our soils! Potatoes like high organic matter, fairly, loose soils that are moderately acid. By moderately acid I mean pH 5.0 to 6.5. Most of our native soils are low in organic matter and are fairly heavy with clay making them tight and neutral to alkaline meaning a pH of 7 to 8.5. Do you see an issue here. In fact while many of our garden crops will tolerate these higher pH soils, they virtually all will do better with a slightly acid pH. Changing garden soil takes time, but it can be done. The first step is to obtain a soil sample from your garden and bring it in to the Extension office so we can send it to the soils lab for analysis. Improving soil for potatoes requires regular addition of lots of organic matter, preferably in the fall. Organic matter can be anything from dried grass clippings, to leaves, compost, cotton bur hulls, rotted silage, manure that has composted for several months, even peat moss. Add as much as your tiller can work in, and do this for several years, always in the fall as soon as you get through gardening. At the same time as you are tilling this in, you will want to add elemental sulfur to lower the pH, assuming that it is higher than we want it for potatoes. How much sulfur you need to add will depend on what pH the soil is right now. You will want to add some nitrogen fertilizer with the organic matter as that will help feed the fungi and microorganisms that break down organic matter and other fertilizers as required from the soil test. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Improving Soil

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Very rarely have I ever heard a gardener say that their garden soil was perfect. They always want it to be better. In most of our region, the biggest challenge for soil is clay, specifically way too much of it. We need to be careful and recognize that clay is a very important part of our soil. It is those tiny little clay particles that have all the cation exchange sites that allow nutrients to latch on and be available for plants to use later on. Clay also gives soil the ability to hold more and more water. The trick is finding the right balance between clay, and the much larger silt and sand particles as well as organic matter in various forms of decomposition. Remember, soil is a living breathing organism; it isn't just dirt! Since everyone knows that clay is hard to work with, and technically many of our soils are clay loams, silty clays and silty clay loams, not pure clay, they want to improve the soil by adding something. Sometimes they think that adding gypsum will help. While gypsum can help with certain conditions, it won't be a benefit in our soils, so save your money. The next thing that people want to add is sand. But unfortunately they usually are just trying to add a little bit of sand. Adding a little bit of sand to most of our soils is a big mistake. You go from having a heavy clay soil, to having something resembling concrete. The one thing that can help more than anything else, and not make a problem worse, is organic matter. Lots and lots of organic matter of virtually any kind. Add it to the garden and rototill it in, WHEN the soil isn't too wet. And do this every single year! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

Chuck Otte.