

Fall Fertilization - What and When

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It is sometimes difficult for homeowners and home gardeners to realize that the best time to fertilize plants may not always be in the spring or the middle of the summer. Lawns are a classic example. The best time and most critical time to fertilize them is in early September and again in late October or early November. The reason for the seemingly late fertilization is because that's when the plants are busy developing their root systems that will dictate how they green up and grow next spring. Even in low maintenance cool season lawns, you're far better off fertilizing once in the fall, although twice would be better. Another good example is spring flowering bulbs. We always used to say to fertilize as they finish blooming. The only problem is that by the time they finish blooming, the roots are often already shutting down as the plant finishes storing food reserves in the bulb for next spring. In reality, the best time to fertilize spring flowering bulbs is NOW. By applying fertilizer now, it has a chance to get into the bulb's root zone so when it really starts growing next year the nutrients are there and ready to be taken up. If you haven't soil tested the flower beds where your bulbs are located, you may want to soon. But in the absence of such soil test information you probably want to apply a well balanced fertilizer like a triple 10 or 12 or 13 or even a bulb type fertilizer like a 9-9-6. Essentially any low testing balanced fertilizer. Generally the application rate would be one rounded teaspoon per square foot of bulb bed or 2.5 pounds per 100 square foot. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Amend Soils in the Fall

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 my biggest frustration with home gardeners is their sense of timing. They want to do everything when their energy level is the highest, usually in March, April, and May. But many tasks are better accomplished at other times. One of those is adding amendments to garden soil. An amendment is anything that you add to change the structure or quality of the soil. In the case of high or low soil pH it would be sulfur to lower the pH or lime to raise the pH. These are chemical reactions that take time to occur. Applying these items in the fall, and tilling or incorporating them into the soil, gives them some time to start working this fall and next spring ahead of planting time. Of course you should never add either of these items without first taking a soil test to see which, if either, you need. Something else that is best added to the soil in the fall is organic matter. Many of our soils have very high clay content which can really be tough to garden in. The best thing to add to these soils is not more soil or sand but organic matter. Organic materials can be compost, dried grass clippings, leaves, hay, straw, rotted and dried manure, even peat moss cotton burr hulls and rotted silage. All of these added to the soil and then well worked in will improve many many aspects of your soil and it's productivity. But again, you are best advised to add these in the fall, and incorporate into the soil so they can start breaking down now. Add as much organic material as you can get incorporated. It also speeds up the process to add some nitrogen fertilizer. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Branches on the ground?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This is the time of year that homeowners can start to find small branches, or even branch tips, on the ground. They pick them all up only to find a whole bunch more a few days later. There are several possible causes for this branch littering. The first is squirrels. Squirrels routinely bite off branch tips to build wintertime nests in trees. They will bite off a bunch of branch tips, drop them to the ground and then go pick them up and carry them to the tree. These branches are usually fairly short and if you look at the end, you'll usually find a very nice and neat angular slice like someone used a knife, or in this case, some very sharp teeth. The best thing to do is leave the branch tips on the ground so the squirrel can get enough material to build his nest and stop snipping off branch tips. Occasionally we'll also find blue jays in trees trying to harvest acorns. They can get kind of rowdy and in the process of trying to pull off acorns, the end of the branch may break off. These will always have acorns attached or a location where the acorns were attached. The last one will be the largest branch tips and the cut end will look like a miniature beaver had chewed all the way around. This is caused by an insect called a twig girdler. They lay eggs on the outer part of that branch, cut it off so it breaks in the wind and then the wind blows the branches around to move the insects to new locations. If you are finding these you should pick them up and burn them or put them in the trash to get the insects responsible out of your yard. And if you aren't sure what's doing it, call me! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.