

Oak 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. If you suddenly feel that you are dealing with chiggers, but they seem to be more located on your neck, shoulders and chest, you probably don't have chiggers at all, but oak itch mites. This bizarre pest causes welts to raise up 10 to 16 hours after being bit, which you never feel the bite by the way. The welts itch like crazy, but if you itch them it hurts. Talk about a cruel misfortune. The oak itch mite lives on a midge larvae that lives in the curled up edges of pin oak, red oak or black oak trees. Once each generation emerges, and a generation is only 7 days long with this pest, they mate, the males die and the females drop off the trees or blow in the wind. If they land on you and inside your clothing there is a chance that they will bite. The numbers of mites coming off infested oak trees can be just astronomical by the way. This pest pops up periodically across the eastern half of the state. It often is a real problem one year, a minor problem the next year and then gone after that. Since it is so strongly tied to another insect feeding on the trees, there are often predators of the leaf midge that builds up and knocks the midge pest down and when that host is gone, so are the oak leaf itch mites. There's no way to treat the pest or the itch mite. They are both protected by leaf tissues. If you have a pin oak tree go out and look at the leaves. If the edges of the leaves are curled up and thickened you have the host and possibly the mite. Insect repellents don't seem to help so just shower and change clothes when you come in and use standard insect bite treatments if bitten. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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Bulb Planting

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Even though you often start seeing spring flowering bulbs like tulips and daffodils in stores in August, I don't like to plant them until the soil starts to cool down. Certainly go out and buy them when you see good deals but don't be in a hurry to plant them. Early planting can cause excessive fall growth which some years may have issues. If you do have early growth that appears above ground, don't worry, they won't develop a flower stalk until after they've gone through the wintery cold weather treatment. The other great thing about spring flowering bulbs is that if you wait until later in October or into November, you can get some great deals on bulbs as stores close them out to move them out of the way. What many gardeners don't realize is that you can plant bulbs clear into late autumn. I've even planted them in early January in mild years when the ground hadn't frozen yet. They bloom a little later the first spring, but after that there's no difference. Planting depth is important with bulbs. Read the directions that come with your bulbs. When they say to plant them six inches deep, I like to make that to the top of the bulb, not the bottom of the hole. Although often the directions will say to the bottom of the hole, don't worry, you'll be hard pressed to plant them too deep. Planting them too shallow is a giant no-no however. If you have heavy clay soils dig a larger hole and mix in peat moss or aged bark. Refill the hole to the proper depth and plant the bulbs, putting amended soil over the top. I also like to mix a little bone meal into the bottom of the planting hole! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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Why Do Houseplants Lose Leaves

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many of us place tropical potted plants outside in the spring so they can enjoy the higher light and warmer temperatures of the summer. But we need to remember that these are tropical plants and cool temperatures can damage them. For some species that may mean the low 50s or high 40s, not just frosty temperatures, so don't be too tardy on bringing them back inside. One thing that people invariably call me about in the fall is why the plants lose their leaves when they bring them inside after summer. Many homeowners assume that it's a water issue or fertilizer issue and do all the wrong things. I don't like to fertilize houseplants until you move them outside in the spring. Watering regime indoors needs to be based on when the soil starts to feel dry not based on what day of the week it is! The real issue with houseplants dropping leaves is sunlight. Even the brightest spot in your house has far less sunlight than what it was receiving outside. Foliage plants develop sun leaves and shade leaves. Sun leaves are thicker, smaller and more numerous. The sun leaves have less chlorophyll, the key component for photosynthesis, and the chlorophyll is located deeper in the leaf. Shade leaves are thinner, larger and fewer in number. When you bring a plant inside, the plant has to adjust its leaves to less light. If it's a sudden drastic shift, the plant will probably drop all its leaves and put out new ones. If you can do it in stages, the leaves may be able to adjust. Regardless, don't change your watering sequence and drown the plant and don't fertilize. Just be patient! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.