

Dividing Peonies

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Last week I talked about cutting back and general management of peonies, which I want to follow up this week with a discussion about dividing peonies. As long as peonies don't get too deep in the soil they can go years, in fact decades, needing very little attention. Peonies are very sensitive to planting depth. If you get the eyes, or new growth buds too deep, they start blooming less and less or don't bloom at all. When blooms start to become fewer and fewer this is the most common problem OR they simply start getting too much shade - they really need full sun. September and early October is a good time to move, replant or divide peonies. Well established peonies can have a huge root system so be prepared to do some digging. Ideally you will dig up the plant, carefully use a hose to wash off the soil and then start cutting tubers apart with a sharp knife into sections that have 3 to 5 eyes with some taproots still attached. With that said, I can tell you that sometimes you may just end up halving or quartering those root clumps with an axe and then replanting them. Whichever method you use, you need to make sure that when you replant them, those buds on the side of the tubers, the eyes if you will - and you will have no problem seeing them - need to be at least one inch but not more than two inches below the soil surface. I tend to go to the one inch level as they always seem to collect soil over the tops. When you dig the hole to replant them dig a little deeper and mix some fertilizer in with the soil UNDER where the plant will be set. Put the plant in place and water. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Turf in the shade

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When people contact me with grass growth problems I always start with two questions. How tall, or short, are you mowing it, and how much direct sunlight does it receive each day. If you ever go walking in the forest you don't see much, if any, grass. There's a reason for that and the reason is lack of sunlight. Grass is a plant of the sunshine. It needs 6 to 8 hours of full direct sunlight a day during the heart of summer. There are some variations in that however. Warm season grasses, species like Bermudagrass, Zoysia and buffalograss, need more. They will grow up to the edge of a tree shade line and then pretty well stop. They stop because the level of sunlight becomes insufficient to carry on photosynthesis. Cool season grasses, while still needing full sun to thrive, can provide marginal growth on lower levels of sunlight. Of our cool season grasses, Kentucky bluegrass probably needs the most sunlight. We usually recommend tall fescue for any shady area in the yard. One way to know if there is not enough light is to plant an area to tall fescue in the fall. If it grows great the first fall and the next spring and then the grass slowly starts to thin out, you have a low light condition. The fine leaf fescues, like creeping red fescue, hard fescue or sheep fescue will do better than tall fescue in those shady areas. The only problem is that those fine leaf fescues don't survive hot dry conditions that we can routinely get. If you have one of these tough shady areas, you may just want to plant to replant every fall so you have grass some of the year, or just plant it to ground cover. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Grass Seed - be careful what you choose!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As I often do this time of year I was at a local store checking out the grass seed they had for sale. Over the years I've pretty well seen it all and much of what is available for sale isn't honestly worth planting. For fall planting you want to consider improved tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass. These are the two grasses, with fescue being my preference, that are best adapted to the wide range of conditions that we encounter in Kansas. To really know what's in a bag of grass seed you need to read the label. The label will tell you how much of each grass species and cultivar is in the bag, where that seed came from and what the germination is. The label will tell you how much weed seed, inert material, or other crop seed is in the bag. Of all of these, crop seed is what you want to avoid. Crop seed is often a grass called orchardgrass and you don't want it in your lawn! I recently saw a bag of grass seed that was 2% crop seed. 2% may not sound like much but if that's orchardgrass, you've got a mess when it starts coming up. Other things that you don't want to see in your grass seed are things like annual ryegrass. Annual means it is going to grow for one year and die. It'll grow fast and look good for a little while, but most people want a turfgrass that will stick around for a few years. Then we find other grass species like perennial rye, creeping red fescue, sheep fescue, or hard fescue that are very attractive fine leaved grasses that just don't like a good hot and dry Kansas summer. Stick with improved tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass, mow it tall and you'll be happier!

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Yellownecked Caterpillars

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. An insect pest that is around quite regularly and that I seldom am asked about is the Yellownecked Caterpillar. This is another one of those hairy caterpillars that we see feeding on trees late in the season. It has narrow light colored stripes running down it's back and sides, it has a black head capsule and a fairly bright yellow or light colored anyway band around the back of the neck. Many homeowners may just assume that these are walnut caterpillars or fall webworms but those are both different species. Walnut caterpillars will come down to the trunk of the tree and shed their skins, which they leave as a nasty tangle on the bark of the trees, before going back up to feed. Yellownecked caterpillars come from egg masses laid in July. They spend their entire 6 week larval cycle in the tree feeding. Early stages of the caterpillar will simply eat the leaf surface leaving a skeletonized leaf that most homeowners won't even notice. As the caterpillar grows though, they start to consume the entire leaf. When they have finished feeding, the caterpillars do move down the tree and to the ground where they will burrow in to the soil to overwinter and pupate. The rather attractive little moth will emerge next summer to mate and lay eggs. I find it fascinating that this creature feeds for 6 weeks out of the year and most of the rest of the time it's in a pupae under ground. The good news is that their feeding damage occurs so late in Kansas that we don't really need to do anything about it. Usually the time that we see them is when they have finished feeding, so not to worry! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.