

Alternative mosquito repellents

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I routinely am asked about alternative or natural or organic methods of repelling mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers and other biting critters. People often ask about putting mosquito plants or other plants with scents around their deck or patio to keep mosquitoes away. While some people swear by these various plants, there is really not much to back up their claims other than their own testimonials. Some plants do show some repellent tendencies in lab conditions, but out here in Kansas, it just doesn't seem to work so well, probably due to wide open spaces and wind. Bottom line, put screening between you and the bugs or use repellents. So the next question is about natural products and there are many that have been promoted over the years. DEET has been the standard for years and is a manufactured chemical pure and simple, but it works. By the way, if you do use DEET, there is no advantage to using a product with more than 30% DEET. When Consumer Reports tested many products against aedes mosquitoes (the kind that would carry Zika), Culex mosquitoes (more common in Kansas) and ticks, they found that Repel Lemon Eucalyptus (a natural product) gave control equal to DEET, basically 7 to 8 hours of protection. All other natural products gave less than one hour of protection. One other product, picaridin, which is a synthetic compound similar to an extract of the black pepper plant, also gave good control if there was at least 20% active ingredient. Deet did well at 15 to 30% active ingredient. So choose your repellent and enjoy summer! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Proper Yard Irrigation

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The great American lawn. It seems that there is an ongoing battle between certain homeowners in every town to have the best looking lawn. I have trouble relating to these lawn-aholics but it seems like expense is not a hindrance for the ongoing quest of the thickest deepest green lawn through the summer. So let's get one thing straight right now. It is okay to not water your lawn and let it go dormant for parts of the summer. The two biggest mistakes I see in lawn care are incorrect mowing height and improper watering. Most lawns in most summers will get along just fine with being watered twice a week, three times a week under really hot conditions. The worst thing you can do is to water you lawn a little bit every day. In a nutshell, here's the goal. Water infrequently but deep. I don't care how many minutes you run your system, how much water are you applying? You need to be applying ½ to one inch per application. Deep soakings will allow better root development which is what you want. Light daily watering will concentrate roots near the soil surface and start to develop a thatch problem. Watering needs to be done in the early morning, 3 a.m. to 9 a.m. This minimizes that amount of time that the grass is wet and reduces the risk of developing foliar diseases in the grass. Never irrigate in the late afternoon and evening as this creates a perfect disease environment. If you don't know how much your sprinkler system applies, put out some rain gauges or even some empty tuna cans around the yard to see. Water is far too valuable to waste! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Safety Around Farm Equipment

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This morning's program has absolutely nothing to do with gardening and everything to do with your and my safety as we travel around the area in our vehicles. Wheat harvest is getting ready to gear up and roll through our region. With it comes lots of big farm equipment and large trucks loaded with grain. To keep everyone safe requires everyone's patience and understanding. All of that equipment has the same right to be on the roadway as you and I do. The same rules of the road apply when you are around them as around every other vehicle. You can NOT pass slow moving equipment in a no passing zone. You are breaking the law. Slow moving equipment does need to pull over and let traffic pass IF more than three vehicles are backed up behind them and WHEN it is safe to do so. If you are on a road with no shoulders, you just need to slow down and patiently wait for a safe opportunity to pass. That equipment takes longer to speed up, longer to stop and more room to maneuver. Give them the space and time that it takes for them to safely move down the road. Remember that farm equipment will use field entrances that we would never use so be extra careful not only at road intersections but at field entrances too. Never pass a vehicle that is making any turn as they may have to swing into the left lane to make a right turn. The key in all of this is patience. I see more and more impatient and aggressive drivers every year. Road construction is rampant right now and adding harvest makes even more reason to be patient! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

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. The spring flowering bulb season, that means things like tulips, daffodils, etc. is over. Many homeowners want to just mow down those leaves once the blooms are gone, but it's important to leave that foliage for a while as that provides the food to restore the energy to the bulb AND form the flower bud for next spring. Remove those old ragged leaves too soon and you slowly reduce the size of the blooms and the number of the blooms. Fortunately, by early June the plants have probably stored up about all the nutrients that they are going to. The exception might be some very late tulips or Dutch iris. If the leaves are browning down nicely, cut them off at ground level. If the leaves are still pretty green, you may want to leave them on for a while longer. I prefer that you clip old foliage off at ground level as pulling on the foliage can sometimes start to pull the bulb up and damage roots. If possible mark where the bulbs are. Come early fall you will want to fertilize this area and there usually is no foliage around at that time. By fertilizing in the fall, the fertilizer will get carried down into the bulb root zone in a timely manner where it can be taken up by the plant when it starts growing in the late winter. Peonies are another plant that you want to leave the foliage intact so that the plant can store up energy. Fertilize them now to encourage that process. If peonies did not bloom well this year, put a flag or stake by the poor performers. Then this fall you will want to dig those up and replant them at the proper depth, eyes 1 to 2 inches deep, to encourage blooming next year! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Puncturevine Control

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 we talked about grass sandburs, those nasty seeds that get caught in your socks and pants cuffs. This week we'll talk about puncturevine. Puncturevine is the broadleaf plant with the little yellow flowers that hugs the ground and can spread out to be over ten feet across. The seeds of puncturevine are hard angular seeds with one long very thick barb or spine. These get stuck in the soles of your shoes and are the culprits of many a flat bicycle or lawnmower tire. Puncturevine is an annual. It comes back from seed every spring and summer. It can start growing as late as July and start producing seed in about 4 to 6 weeks. Unlike sandburs, most of our pre-emerge herbicides are not very effective against puncturevine. It is on the label of one of the lesser used products - contact me for details. Puncturevine is going to grow in areas of thin or no grass that are hot and sunny. Since it is usually where we've had it before, my recommendation is to learn to identify the small plants and get them sprayed with a dandelion type weed killer. You want to avoid using these when it's above about 85 degrees or when it's windy. If you are near vegetable gardens, don't spray them at all as you will damage sensitive plants like tomatoes! Just one post emerge treatment is not going to stop them all. You will need to spray about once a month clear into the first half of September. Like other weeds, puncturevine grows where there isn't a lot of competition so try to keep grass mowed tall, thick and healthy. If you want to see photos of seedling puncturevine, call me! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.