

Late May Gardening

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I know it's hard to believe but we are half way through the month of May. Things are warming up and it's time to wrap up spring planting in the garden. Notice I said spring planting, July and August brings us a whole new round of garden planting! What we are basically planting now are our heat loving crops. The cool loving things, like a lot of the leafy vegetables, we are too late for - hold off for a fall planting. But what can or should we be planting now? In the flower beds, it's now wide open. Get planting all those summer plants including things like Elephant Ears or caladiums. Back in the vegetable garden there's a lot to do. Anything that vines, well almost anything that vines, can be planted now: cucumbers, melons or all kinds, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and summer squash are all fair game. Winter squash, things like acorn and butternut, you need to hold off until early to mid June. Beans, either snap or lima can be planted now thru mid June. All of those nightshade relatives, eggplant, tomatoes and peppers, can go in the ground any time this month. Okra can also be planted any time in May and sweet corn can be planted clear up to the end of June. We've had some good rains and the soils are warming up so crops should be up and growing fast. But so will the weeds so be ready to hoe or use some weed preventers when appropriate. Mulch is an excellent weed control option but with some of the crops, like tomatoes, you may want to wait until the soil warms up a little bit more. Mulch helps hold in moisture but can also slow soil warming! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Thinning - the hardest gardener chore

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Gardeners are nurturers. It's their very nature to want to grow things, to keep them alive and to help them flourish. So it really isn't much of a surprise that the hardest thing that gardeners have to do is to thin. We often plant more radish or carrot or whatever seeds we're planting to make sure we've got a stand, but then when the seedlings come up, do we really go back and thin them out? All too often, no we don't. So we wind up with overcrowded plants that don't allow for proper development and the veggies we harvest are inferior to what we had hoped for. All of this brought on because we were too tender hearted to go in and thin to the proper spacing after germination. I know it's tough to do, but you have to do it! Then we get to fruit trees and the task only gets harder. We often don't get much of a fruit crop so when we do get a good fruit set we just can't bring ourselves to thin the fruit out and then, again, the fruit is undersized or the limbs start to droop and we have to prop them up to keep them from breaking, all because we just can't bear to pull off some fruit that is alive and developing. After fruit set, all fruit goes through a natural drop. It should be fairly easy to see when this happens. After that point then re-evaluate how many fruit you have per branch.

Measure the branch and figure out if you're over the following limits and if so, THIN! Apples and pears, one fruit for every 4 to 6 inches, peaches, 6 to 8 inches, plums and prune 4 to 5 inches and apricots, 2 to 4 inches, Cherries aren't thinned so no problem. If you are over limit, start thinning! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Vein Pocket Galls on oak

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Galls are abnormal swellings on plants usually caused by an insect. These can be on the stems of plants, they can occur in the flowers and more commonly they occur on the leaves. There are literally hundreds of insect species that cause galls and they are usually very specific to one species or closely related species. While they can look unsightly, sometimes really unsightly, the actual damage they do to the plant is usually minimal and anyway, control is next to impossible to achieve. Last year we became painfully aware of galls on our pin oak and other red oaks not because of the gall themselves, but because of a mite that feeds on the insect that causes the galls. This mite is known as the oak leaf itch mite. These rascals, when they become adults and fall off the tree leaves, can land on us and create a chigger like bite that is worse than a chigger. These bites are almost always from the waist up and often not under tight fitting clothing but just out in the open. Well, I was just looking at my crimson oak at the office and I'm already seeing the margin leaf gall that is one of the main food sources for the oak leaf itch mite. It's too early to know if it will be as bad as last year, but the chance is still there. If you notice that the edges of the leaves on your red or pin oak are curled up and thickened, then you have the gall and the mite may very well follow. There's nothing that can be sprayed to treat either one and the itch mite isn't phased by insect repellents. All you can do is avoid these areas as we get into mid and late summer. I'll keep monitoring the situation and let you know! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.