

Gardening Tips for November 21 - 27, 2016

How Wacky is this Weather

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Hey, let's start an argument. Global warming is happening. Period. The scientific proof is overwhelming. You can play all the word games in the world and it won't matter, the climate is getting warmer. If you want to argue about anything we can argue about how much of it is caused by human activities, but that won't change the fact that the earth is getting warmer. Weather extremes like we've seen this fall are ongoing proof of that. November 2016 will be one of the warmest if not THE warmest November on record. It just depends on how close the 10 day forecast is to correct. Even if we have some cold weather in December, 2016 is going to be one hot year! So what does that mean for our lawns and our gardens? I think the best way to sum it up is changing expectations! We need to start thinking about our landscapes differently. We need to look to Oklahoma and Texas for some leads on landscape trees and shrubs. Maybe more crape myrtles. Perhaps some of those warmer climates azaleas will be in order. But with forecasts for potentially drier years, we also need to start thinking about more drip irrigation for landscape plants, and transitions to warm season grasses, at least in sunny areas, that will stay green through the summer with far less rain. The bottom line is we don't know how far this will go and what will happen next. My tomatoes finally just froze down. It was after the 15th of November and I was still harvesting fresh tomatoes. Unbelievable. We need to be careful with business as usual. We also need to learn to be more adaptable, so stay tuned! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Garden Soil Preparation

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One nice thing about this crazy warm and now somewhat dry fall is that we have a great opportunity to get our gardens tilled up this fall. If you need to add sulfur to lower pH or lime to raise pH, or want to get some organic matter added then fall is a great time to do that. You want the soil somewhat dried out if you are going to till it so the slightly drier weather we've been having has made things pretty good. If we get very much rain, you'll have to wait until it dries back out to get it tilled. Doing this tillage in the fall allows the lime or sulfur to start interacting with the soil. These are chemical reactions and they work really slow so the sooner you can get the amendments into the ground, the better. Likewise, organic matter breakdown is a slow process. It takes time, moisture and nutrients so adding a little nitrogen fertilizer can help speed this process up. But perhaps a bigger question is why do you even want to worry about tilling in the fall? The bottom line is time. You can get your garden tilled up and smoothed out this fall. For the most part you aren't going to have very many weed seeds germinate now. So you are basically all ready to go come spring. In the spring, soils are more likely to be wet and cold. It takes longer to dry out. So you can't get anything planted until you get the garden tilled. You can't till the garden until it dries out. But if it was tilled in the fall, you can be out there on March 1 planting your English Peas. On St. Patrick's day you can be planting your potatoes. You'll be the one getting things planted when everyone else is waiting to till! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Oh Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas Tree

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'm sorry to be the one to do this to you, but I think we all know that once Thanksgiving Day is over, it's full speed into Christmas and that means Christmas trees. Now, if you are one of the unfortunate ones that get your Christmas tree out of the attic, you can quit listening now! For the rest of you, and me, having that real Christmas tree in the house makes it truly seem like Christmas. You can not emulate the look or the smell of a real tree. But to keep that real tree an attractive addition to your home and not a dreaded dried up mess, there's a few things you need to do. Ideally, you can go to a Christmas Tree farm and cut down your own fresh Christmas tree. Or maybe you go out to the pasture and get a cedar tree. That's what we used to do when I was growing up! You see, the fresher the tree, the better it will look and smell and the longer it will last. If you can't cut your own, or get a fresh one shipped in, then select with care. Look through the lot and when you find one you think you like, grab it and thump it butt end first on the ground. If needles fall off like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree, put it back and keep looking. Also, a needle bent between the index finger and thumb should bend, not break. Once you get it home you want it in the stand or a bucket of water just as soon as possible. Before you put it in the water though, cut a half inch off the bottom of the trunk. This cuts off the dried up sap and resins and allows the tree to take up water again. It's important that you check the water once or twice a day as the tree will take up a lot of water! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Happy Thanksgiving everyone!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I guess it just stands to reason that the older you get the more reflective you become and hopefully the more thankful you become. I'll be gathering with family today and like many others, I'll eat too much and then probably fall asleep under a turkey induced stupor. My list of thank you's is probably way too long but I don't think that is a bad thing. So, with that in mind, I'd better get busy here. I'm thankful for all the farmers that grew the food we'll enjoy today. You hear so much about corporate ag and big ag and this food threat and that food threat and you don't want this in your food but make sure you have that in your food. I don't really worry about all of that. Yes there is corporate ag out there. And most of it is family farm corporations NOT some big multinational conglomerate. Most of the food that I eat today will come from US producers. Turkey's could come from southeast Kansas, cranberries from New Jersey, sweet potatoes from Mississippi, potatoes from either Maine or Idaho. Green bean casserole, thank you very much with green beans from Florida, or maybe central California. Oh, and lets not forget the pumpkin pie, although it should be called squash pie! For many of us, Thanksgiving, in addition to being an all American holiday is often filled with all American foods as well. Before I run out of time, I'm also thankful for all those web pages and folks out there with all the warnings and nonsense about this or that food. I'm thankful because it means job security for me, debunking all those myths! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte wishing you a Happy Thanksgiving.

I want to grow my own apple tree!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. At least a couple of times a year, someone will contact me about how to grow a fruit tree from a cherry pit, an apple seed or a peach seed. I always sigh and pause because they aren't going to be happy with my answer. The short answer, you basically can't. Well, I can teach you how to treat that fruit seed and make it sprout and grow. But you aren't going to be happy with the results. I don't think that there's a fruit variety out there that is a pure line. In other words, there's no way to know what you're going to get when you get that seed to grow let alone it's liable to be 7 to 10 years before it will start bearing fruit. I'm not sure about peaches and cherries, but apples are a real crap shoot. Apples basically have to be cross pollinated from another tree. About 1 in every 80,000 apple seedlings will produce commercial quality fruit. If you take the seed from that apple that you thought was so tasty and grow those seeds out, it's pretty much assured that you won't be happy with what you have. I have a graduate degree in plant breeding and genetics. At one time I seriously wanted to be a fruit tree breeder. It is a long and tedious process to create a new apple cultivar. Fruit trees are produced not from seed, but by grafting. All of those red delicious apples out there came from one tree originally found in Iowa in 1880. It was a sport or a mutation on a branch. That branch was used for cuttings that were grafted on to rootstocks. Nowadays those are dwarf rootstocks. So when you find that envelope that contains those apple seeds, you might as well toss them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.