

## Pack Rats

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We have a lot of rodents in Kansas. We're a prairie state and rodents love the grasslands. One in particular, the eastern woodrat, a.k.a the packrat is of great interest and great concern. The interest comes from their kleptomaniac tendencies of swiping things from us - often pretty colored or shiny things - and taking them back to their den, or what we see as a pile of sticks. The concern comes from their bad habit of getting up into the engine compartments of vehicles and chewing off wires that they will then take back to their dens also. They can easily do hundreds of dollars worth of damage to a vehicle in very short order. Poison baits often are not very effective as they are prone to hauling the pelleted baits back to the den without ever eating them. Rat traps baited with peanut butter or sometimes an aluminum foil wrapped trigger can be effective. Repellents, regardless of the manufacturer's claims just don't work. Moth balls need to be in a fairly tight enclosure to work and most car engine compartments are simply too airy. There are two non lethal techniques that many people have reported success with to reduce or eliminate damage. Open the hood of the car and place a light inside the engine compartment. Like most rodents, woodrats fear predators and by having an open engine compartment or a brightly illuminated engine compartment, they associate both of these with being visible and at risk. And with many of the new LED work lights or trouble lights, you can have a lot of illumination without generating a lot of heat or using a lot of electricity! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK,

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## Mowing height of fall lawns

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've had children, you know the importance of a stable routine. Getting up and going to bed at the same time, meals at the same time - that routine is good and provides stability. Lawns need stability too. Certainly not in when they wake up or go to bed, but in mowing height. Lawn grasses have certain fairly narrow mowing height ranges that they seem to perform best when kept within this range. Letting grass get really tall then whacking it off short causes the plants to gain and lose root mass and this can lead to thatch issues. Some people want to let their grass get really tall in the fall and leave that growth on the lawn as they head into winter. Others want to mow the lawn short the last time that they mow it. Regardless of the reasoning homeowners use to arrive at these decisions, both are incorrect. A lawn that is in good health going into winter is going to be the most resilient and will green up quicker in the spring and grow better. Lawn health is predicated by good moisture, good fertility and consistent mowing height through the fall. Fescue's preferred mowing height is 2.5 to 3.5 inches, bluegrass is 2 to 3 inches. If you want to mow the lawn short the last mowing of winter, then fine, don't go lower than 2.5 inches on your fescue. Want to leave the fescue tall going into winter? Fine. Don't let it go taller than 3.5 inches. In reality, just keep mowing the lawn at the same 3.5 inch height in the fall. Then, when you mow it that first time in the spring, go ahead and drop the mower down to 2.5 to 3 inches and get some of that dead grass off. In the mean time, be consistent! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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## Late tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I did something kind of crazy this year. I knew that I was going to be gone two different times during the growing season - first in late July and secondly in late September. So in late June I planted tomato seeds in my backyard. The plants were just getting growing well in late July when I was gone and they were really starting to set on when I was gone in late September. I'm now harvesting all sorts of tomatoes but I also know that when that first frost arrives which is likely still several weeks off, that I'm going to have a bunch of green tomatoes. So here's what I'm going to do as I head into that fateful end of the growing season evening. I will harvest any tomatoes of any size. I'll sort them into three groups - those that are mostly red, those just starting to turn red and those that are green with no hint of red. Any tomatoes that have breaks in the skin or surface defects will go to the compost pile. The tomatoes that are nearly ripe will be set on the kitchen counter and will continue to ripen just fine. Those that are showing any reddish color will be set aside at room temperature and they will continue to slowly ripen and also be good eating. Once a tomato has any color to the skin, all of the flavor compounds are present and once it is fully red it will taste just fine. The tomatoes that were fully green I'll carefully place in cardboard boxes in single layers, separated with newspapers and placed in the garage at as close to 55 degrees as I can manage. If they go ahead and ripen I'll use them that way. If they don't ripen, I'll just go ahead and have myself a nice batch of fried green tomatoes! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

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## Fall planting of asparagus and rhubarb

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Two of the earliest garden plants of the year are asparagus and rhubarb, which just happen to be two of my favorite garden plants. We often think of planting these in the spring, but they can also be planted in the fall with equal success. With that said, let me add that rhubarb really needs well drained soil high in organic matter. If you don't have a well drained location, don't try to hurry up and get some planted this fall - take the fall instead to build up a nice mound and get it well amended with organic matter and then plant the rhubarb next spring. Now, most of the time, you aren't going to find rhubarb or asparagus at the garden center in the fall. If you do, great, go for it. No, what's more than likely going to happen is that you are transplanting some from one part of your garden to another or from someone else's garden to yours. If this is a new experience for you, stop by the Extension Office and pick up copies of our bulletins on both of these plants. Get the soil prepared just as you would with a spring planting. Rhubarb will probably need to be mulched fairly heavily to prevent frost heaving, especially if we have a lot of freeze thaw cycles through the winter. Asparagus is planted much deeper though so we don't have to worry about it as much. With a new planting of asparagus we often put it deep in a trench and fill the trench in as it grows. If you are moving mature plants just get as much of the root system as you can, and then plant it deep, just like it was and level the soil out. Water well after planting to eliminate air pockets. Don't harvest it the first year. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

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## Preventing Sunscald on thin-barked trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Certain species of trees are very thin barked.

Probably highest on the list of thin barked species is maple followed by linden and ash. These species are very prone to what we sometimes call winter damage but is more appropriately called sunscald! When a thin barked tree grows, the bark on the side facing the sun, generally the south, is thicker than the bark on the north. Studies have shown that in the winter time, the temperature of the bark on the south side of the tree can be 40 degrees warmer. When this happens, the south side of the tree loses winter hardiness, sap starts flowing and then when cold and cloudy weather returns we can have lethal freezing situations that end up killing the bark. The tree is not killed but we can wind up with areas showing up 2 or 3 years later where the bark cracks and falls off showing large dead looking areas. Now, with a little TLC these trees will go ahead and survive but the damage certainly slows them down. When you are transplanting trees from a nursery, try to find out which way they were oriented and keep them in that direction. For the first 2 to 3 years after transplanting use a light colored paper tree wrap around the tree from the ground up to the first branches. Apply this in October or November and remove it the following March.

One of the old fashioned methods was to paint the trunk white with latex paint. While this can help, I'd rather use the paper wrap. Failure to remove the wrap the following spring can lead to problems of it's own so don't forget to do it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.