

Gardening Tips for September 12 - 18, 2016

Don't Waste Leaves

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Here and there you are starting to catch just a glimpse of the slightest of leaf color changes. But no, today's program is not about whether it's going to be a good year for fall color or not - but it may well be. This program is all about what a valuable resource tree leaves are and how I don't want you to waste them! Far too many homeowners view leaves as a nuisance that they have to rake up and get rid of. I view tree leaves as a valuable resource that shouldn't be burned or trashed! The big issue with leaves is that they are bulky. Some yards are blessed with lots of big leaves, others of us have trees with lots of small leaves - I'm not sure which is worse! Leaves are valuable sources of organic matter and nutrients which is why I hate to just see them set ablaze or sent to a landfill somewhere. They are one of the easiest and quickest ways to create some great compost, they are also a great way to add organic matter to flower beds or gardens. Shred them up and they make excellent mulch for tender perennials in winter. One way that I find them to be easily dealt with is your mulching mower. If you have a few leaves, just mow over them and mulch them up. The lawn can handle them and they'll disappear to nothing by next year. OR you can put that bagger on your mower, that I tell you never to use, and then you can shred them and add some grass clippings to them and put them in the compost bin, compost pile or spread them over your garden. Then you can till the leaves into your garden this fall for nutrients and improved tilth next year. Just don't waste the leaves! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Garlic

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This is Kansas. We understand wheat. We know that you have to plant wheat in the fall so that the young plants can go through a cold treatment which then trips the switch to make them put up a seed stalk next spring. Garlic is kind of like that. We plant the individual clove of garlic. If that clove never goes through a cold treatment, it just keeps growing like an onion and never knows that it needs to develop what are called daughter bulbs. Many people plant garlic in the spring and have no success in growing it. If you plant garlic now, even clear into early November, the roots will start to develop, it will get itself established and the cold treatment will trigger it and next spring it will develop those daughter bulbs, or cloves, that we like to use in our cooking! Or at least I do!! You need to order good high quality garlic bulbs from a reputable source. There are many different types of garlic and if you just use what you buy for cooking at the grocery store, you don't know what you are getting for sure. If you can't find garlic at a garden center, I can direct you to some good on line internet sources. Work your ground. It's often advisable to add fertilizer, like one pound of 12-12-12 per 100 square feet and work in when you till. When you have your seed garlic, as opposed to garlic seed, separate into individual cloves and plant them 1 to 2 inches deep about 6 inches apart. Then cover back up with soil. Water the area down well and consider mulching to hold the heat this fall as well as to keep it cool next year. Harvest will occur in June or July, depending on the weather. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Praying Mantises

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I can't believe all the questions I've been receiving lately about praying mantises, or mantids. I'm sure that much of this has been brought on by now famous Rally Mantis of the Kansas City Royals baseball team. Regardless of why, I'm really pleased to see folk's interest in praying mantises. Their life cycle is about over for this year as they die with the cold weather of autumn. The most common mantis around here is the Carolina Mantis that is about 2 inches long. Females have undeveloped wings and short broad abdomens. Males have well developed wings and long slender abdomens. The females are busy laying egg cases now that will overwinter and hatch in spring. Egg cases are brown and look like little rows of something. They are laid on weed stalk or branches of trees or shrubs. Upon hatching in the spring, mantids will sometimes eat their siblings, but soon separate and go off to spend the rest of the summer eating other insects. Praying mantis can be kept in cages indoors, but they still won't survive the winter - they just don't live that long. I'd prefer to leave the mantids outside where they can continue to mate and lay eggs for next year. Occasionally you may see a really big mantis, upwards of four plus inches long. This is the Chinese mantid which obviously is NOT native to Kansas. This mantid is so big that they have been known to ambush hummingbirds at feeders and kill them. So, if you are ordering mantis egg cases for your garden in future years, please make sure that you are getting Carolina mantid egg cases, not the Chinese mantid! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Osage Orange/Hedge Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With fall coming on and the inevitable attempted invasion by insects and spiders I will once again be answering questions about whether orange orange fruit, a.k.a. hedge apples or hedge balls, will in fact keep insects out of your home. I'm sorry to say that I can find NO replicated reliable research to confirm this. People that claim that it works also have homes that are so neat and clean you can probably eat off the floor. But anyway, knock yourself out - just don't go buying these off the internet, you can cruise backroads and probably find them on the road or in the ditches for free. They do make nice seasonal decorations however, Whatever name you know it by Osage orange, hedge, bois d'arc or whatever, the tree is rather interesting. This member of the mulberry family has a very limited native range of eastern central Texas, extreme southwest Arkansas and southeast Oklahoma. That is it. Because of its dense and rot resistant wood, it was planted across a great part of the central and southeastern US where it is still routinely harvested for fence posts. Interestingly, you don't have to go too far north across Nebraska until you have passed their cold hardiness zone. They can be a nuisance as squirrels, deer, and cattle will eat them and sow the seeds all across an area. Hedge is just about the densest wood we have in Kansas being 25% denser, or heavier, than oak on a per volume basis. While it tends to spark a lot making it unsuitable for fireplaces, it cranks out a lot of BTUs for wood stoves. So call it what you want, believe what you want, it's a neat tree! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Harvesting Apples

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Not all apples are created equally and no two years are ever the same. Calendars of when different varieties of apples are ripe are only suggestions and guides and not hard and fast rules. The only way to tell if apples are truly ripe is to periodically sample one. You can look at the under color, that color in the blossom end of the apple and it will change from an immature green color to a light green or cream color. Amount of redness doesn't always count. Many cultivars will start to release from the tree more easily as they approach maturity. You should be able to grab the apple, place your thumb against the stem and pop it loose. If you are breaking off branch tips with leaves you are doing it wrong and need to stop as you are damaging the portion of the branch where it blooms and bears fruit. Fruit will continue to ripen after harvest but the longer you can leave it on the tree generally the sweeter and better flavor you will have. After picking, wash the fruit gently and sort into those with flaws or insect damage that you will want to use first and those in better shape for storage for later. Storing in plastic bags with small holes will help them last longer. Check them every 2 to 4 weeks for condition, and use before they go out of condition. Not all varieties have the same storage life. Fuji, Arkansas Black and Granny Smith can store for up to 8 months under refrigeration. Varieties like Gala, Jonathan and Delicious are more like 3 to 4 months. That assumes ideal storage conditions. For more information on harvest and storage, contact me. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.