

Gardening Tips for September 26 - October 2, 2016

Moles!!!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We had a wonderfully wet summer. It meant that even un-irrigated lawns like mine stayed green, and needed mowing, alllll summer long. But one other thing that the wet summer did was make for an ideal situation for moles to get active and busy, and from the questions I've been receiving and the situation in my own yard, the moles have been VERY active. Let me just start right up front and tell you that there is no simple solution for getting rid of moles. Poison baits will work, if the moles eat them. But a moles feeding reflex is based on swimming through the soil and when its nose touches something that moves, they bite it and eat it. Most baits just sit in the tunnel and do nothing. Noise makers and solutions that are supposed to smell bad, don't really work either and don't even get me started on the high dollar ultrasound devices. None of them work. You can try to control the food source, grubs, worms and other soil insects, but this takes time and may only be short lived depending on your location. Poison gasses, dry ice and even water from a garden hose MAY work, if the mole is close to where your point of attack is. Trapping is the most effective method, but it takes time and patience. Ultimately, I'm a believer in letting time run its course. Eventually the mole eats all the food and leaves. In the meantime, keep stomping down tunnels to eliminate air pockets which can damage roots. But also keep that pitch fork handy just in case you are outside some evening and start to see the soil moving! It may be your only chance to get him!

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Are Ornamental Peppers Edible?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Over the past decade or so plant breeders have developed an incredible group of chile pepper plants that have been selected specifically as ornamentals to plant in landscape and flower beds. Which often then brings up the question of whether these peppers are edible. Which gives us an excellent opportunity to discuss the work of plant breeders. When you have a plant species that has historically been grown as a food crop, such as peppers or kale or sweet potatoes, those cultivars or varieties that we grow in our vegetable gardens were selected for their ability to produce a product that is, well, tasty, or perhaps for abundant production. It may not be a really pretty plant though. Plant breeders painstakingly make lots of crosses to look at lots of genetic interactions and then start a many year process of selecting lines for certain traits. In general, probably 999 of every 1000 plants are tossed as they don't have whatever trait is being looked for. But in this process, the plant breeder may come across some plants that while maybe not flavorful, are really attractive to the eye. Rather than pitch these because they weren't very tasty, someone said, "Hey, why don't we plant this in a flower garden to satisfy the eye, not necessarily though the tongue. And that is how ornamental varieties of vegetable plants came to be. Are they still edible? Of course they are. Are they tasty? Maybe so, maybe not. You can go ahead and try them, just don't get your hopes up too high. If you enjoy the flavor, or heat in the case of peppers, great! If not, enjoy them with the eye! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bindweed Control

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When the Russian settlers came to Kansas in the middle of the 19th century, they brought with them bags of Turkey Red Wheat which revolutionized Kansas agriculture. Tucked into those bags of wheat seed was a tiny little black seed shaped sort of like an orange slice. This little seed ended up being planted as well and is now the scourge that we all know as field bindweed, a deep rooted perennial vine with pretty white flowers. Bindweed can be a real pest in lawns, gardens and landscape beds, especially in newer neighborhoods in town. Bindweed establishes fast, grows rapidly and can be a real problem in lawns and gardens. Being a perennial, it is still growing well and will continue to do so until we have temperatures down into the low 20s. Being a perennial it is also very busy right now moving food reserves into the roots as it gets ready for winter. Therefore, from now until we have a really hard freeze is a great time to be treating bindweed. In yards, just using your regular dandelion type broadleaf weed killers will work great. In gardens, assuming that you've gotten all the garden cleared off, I'd recommend glyphosate, often sold as Roundup or Kleenup, to avoid any risk of soil residual problems next year. If you are going to till your garden this fall and want to deal with the bindweed, spray it first and then wait at least a week before tilling. In lawn areas, crabgrass killers that contain the active ingredient quinclorac also works very well. The active ingredient, quinclorac is very active on bindweed. But again, only in lawn areas, not garden areas. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Amend Soils in the fall

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One of my biggest frustration with home gardeners is their sense of timing. They want to do everything when their energy level is the highest, usually in March, April, and May. But many tasks are better accomplished at other times. One of those is adding amendments to garden soil. An amendment is anything that you add to change the structure or quality of the soil. In the case of high or low soil pH it would be sulfur to lower the pH or lime to raise the pH. These are chemical reactions that take time to occur. Applying these items in the fall, and tilling or incorporating them into the soil, gives them some time to start working this fall and next spring ahead of planting time. Of course you should never add either of these items without first taking a soil test to see which, if either, you need. Something else that is best added to the soil in the fall is organic matter. Many of our soils have very high clay content which can really be tough to garden in. The best thing to add to these soils is not more soil or sand but organic matter. Organic materials can be compost, dried grass clippings, leaves, hay, straw, rotted and dried manure, even peat moss cotton burr hulls and rotted silage. All of these added to the soil and then well worked in will improve many many aspects of your soil and it's productivity. But again, you are best advised to add these in the fall, and incorporate into the soil so they can start breaking down now. Add as much organic material as you can get incorporated. It also speeds up the process to add some nitrogen fertilizer. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bringing plants inside in the fall

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many of us, myself included, have plants outside during the summertime that we haul inside during the winter. These may be tropical plants that aren't winter hardy, or maybe it's something unusual that you're just having fun with. I had some hot little chile pepper plants that I did that with for over ten years. Chile's are a perennial, they just don't have cold tolerance. Anyway, there is a natural tendency to either be in a hurry to get them in, as in you move them in on Labor Day weekend, or you push the window as far as you can and bring them in just before a frost. Regardless, the worst thing you can do is just grab the plants and haul them inside on a moments notice. You want to take a little time to perhaps do some pruning or cutting back of the plant. Clean excess debris out of the plant as well as out of the top of the pot. I'm not a big fan of repotting in the fall, I feel it puts too much stress on the plant - wait and do that in the spring when you take it outside. Sometimes you can bring little gnats back into the house from that are living in the potting soil. It's often a good idea to mix up a garden insecticide in a bucket and flush it through the potting soil about a week before you bring it inside to kill any insects living in the soil. You also don't want to bring it in and fertilize it very heavily in the fall. You are often bringing a plant in from bright light to marginal light and fertilizing it just puts more stress on the plant. The goal is to get the plant to survive through the winter. Water when the soil feels dry, don't fertilize it, keep it away from drafts and just get it through! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.