

### Summer Lawn Care - Irrigation

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 willing to bet that 3/4 of the people who water their lawns in the summer are doing it wrong one way or another. Cool season grasses, if not supplied with adequate water from irrigation or rainfall, will go dormant in normal summer temperatures. Dormant is not dead. But tall fescue especially needs a good deep soaking, an inch or rain or irrigation, about once a month to prevent damage to the crowns of the plant from dehydration. So if you don't want to water your lawn, park the lawn mower and don't water it. If you do water it, you want to irrigate deeply and infrequently. Any irrigation that puts on less than a half inch of water is basically a waste of time. It takes an inch to soak up about 6 inches of soil and so a half inch will wet the top three inches. Applying at least one half inch twice a week is normally going to be more than adequate to keep your lawn growing through the heat of summer. Daily little spritzings, which many systems are set up to apply, don't do a lot of good and may actually promote grass diseases like brown patch. Daily light waterings also tend to concentrate root development in the top half inch of soil which then leads eventually to thatch problems. Put rain gauges or straight sided cans in your yard to measure actual water applied. There are so many different combinations of settings and sprinkler heads with irrigation systems that saying it runs 20 minutes per cycle doesn't tell us anything. A large screwdriver or a dandelion digger can be a good soil moisture tester. If you can push it easily into the soil, there's plenty of soil moisture! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Summer Lawn Care - Mowing

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay you lawnaholic mower jocks. We're heading into the heat of summer. You and your zero turn lawn mower need to take it easy.

Yesterday we talked about how drying crowns of grass plants, I said drying not dying, can be an issue if you aren't watering very much. Even if you are watering, heavily, or the rain picks back up, you need to still take it easy. Even a small riding lawn mower can weigh 400 pounds without the driver. You get into the zero turn mowers or larger riding lawn mowers and all of a sudden you are at 500 to 900 pounds without the driver. If you are mowing a dormant lawn and why would you do this, that kind of weight will damage those dormant crowns. Damage a dormant crown, it dries out even more and then you have a dead crown and a dead grass plant. If you are watering heavily or it's raining, you have soil conditions that first of all you will compact with equipment that heavy. And if you go flying around like I see far too many of you, and if I ever find the person that came up with the advertising line of "it's how well you mow fast", I'll give them a piece of my mind, you will be tearing up grass and that includes crowns of the plant. If you are watering your lawn as I described yesterday, then mow the day before the sprinkler is set to come on. That way the soil will be partially dried down and compaction will be less likely. It is crucial, though, that you keep mowing at 3 to 3½ inches tall to keep those grass blades long to shelter and cool the soil. Then also make sure that you are keeping your mower blade sharp! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Slime Molds

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I have received several calls in the past couple of weeks about black or gray gunk growing on the grass in lawns. In every case the homeowners were very concerned. The gunk of concern is something we see every year and it is known as slime mold. There are many types of slime mold. The one growing on the grass looks about like BBQ charcoal ashes were dumped on the grass. The stuff shows up overnight and can be gone in a matter of days. Slime molds are primitive organisms that aren't even considered a disease. The spores float around in the air and when the conditions are right they will land on turf or sometimes mulch and very quickly colonize, mature and release other spores into the air. They are using the grass blades or the mulch simply as something to land on and grow. They do not damage the grass at all. In fact you can usually clean it off the grass with a broom or a strong stream of water. If you mow over a slime mold patch you may even see a puff of black powder come out as spores are released. Slime mold come and go throughout the summer dependent on proper temperature and moisture conditions. The slim mold that we often see growing on mulch has been described as anything from an alien invader to scrambled eggs to dog vomit. Some of it is quite intriguing while other times it'll be quite disgusting. If it shows up, just scoop it up with a shovel and throw it in the trash if it really bothers you. It'll eventually dry down and disappear. So slime molds may show up anywhere, at anytime. But they aren't anything to be concerned about! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Go easy on fertilizing the tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Some gardeners rarely fertilize their gardens, and their produce shows it. But too many gardeners, especially those with tomatoes, go a little bit crazy with the fertilizer and then they suffer from other problems. Excessive nitrogen on tomatoes can result in a huge plant with very few tomatoes. If your tomatoes grow and grow and grow but are hardly blooming or setting fruit, excess nitrogen fertilization is the problem.

Assuming you fertilized before planting, wait until about 2 weeks prior to the first fruit being ripe and then lightly fertilize with a nitrogen fertilizer. Blood meal, nitrate of soda or ammonium sulfate are probably the best nitrogen sources to use. You want about a tenth of a pound of actual nitrogen per 30 foot of row. This would be 1.5 cups of nitrate of soda, or 14 ounces of blood meal or ½ cup of ammonium sulfate per 30 foot of row. Repeat this every couple of weeks. With the recent hot weather I can guarantee you that we will be seeing some issues with tomatoes.

Daytime highs above 90 degrees, especially early in the season, will cause tomato blooms to abort. Just be patient, it'll start bearing soon enough. You can also expect some of the tomatoes to be suffering from blossom end rot. That's where the bottom of the tomato fruit turns brown and sinks in as it starts to ripen. This is a physiological condition caused by an imbalance between the roots and the top growth. There's nothing you need to do other than maintain a constant soil moisture condition and be patient. The plants will grow out of this pretty soon as well! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Fruit thinning

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The hardest thing in the world for a gardener is to thin out young plants in the garden or remove fruit from a fruit tree. Yet both need to be done to improve the size of the remaining produce. I was really surprised that I have wound up with as many apples and pears on my trees as I did. I honestly expected nothing. And in visiting with other fruit tree owners, some have a lot of fruit on them. A fruit tree has the ability to produce a certain number of pounds of fruit. The tree doesn't care if there's 1,000 apples or 250. It'll adjust the size of the fruit accordingly. To some extent it is better for the tree to have 1,000 small apples as there will be more seeds to propagate it. But from a consumer point of view, you likely want 250 nice sized apples, than a thousand the size of quarters. Cherries we don't thin as we don't usually see this problem, but peaches, apples and pears will need thinning if we have good fruit set. Apples and pears should be spaced every four inches and peaches every 6 to 8 inches. Now this is an average. If the branch is three feet long then you want no more than 9 apples or pears along that branch or 4 to 6 peaches. You may have two fruit right next to each other so just work out the averages. Yes, I know it may be hard to remove that extra fruit, but it'll be better for you and the tree in the long run. Continue to spray for insects and disease. Also clip off sucker growth from the base of the tree as well as water sprouts. Water sprouts are those branches that can grow from anywhere on the tree and shoot straight up. These can be removed anytime that you see them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.