

Rhubarb

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I grew up on a farm that had a huge rhubarb patch and I loved it. That tartness and the fact that it, along with asparagus, was one of the first fresh vegetables of spring. Interestingly, rhubarb doesn't really have much nutritional value. It's essentially a leaf stalk with few redeeming qualities and I love it! Rhubarb can be a bit tricky to grow, but once established it's hardy. It really needs good drainage both water moving away from it and well drained soil so it doesn't get waterlogged and develop root rot. With all of our heavy clay soils it is often a good idea to plant it on a bit of a berm and mix a generous portion of well rotted barnyard manure into the soil under where you are planting it. Figure one to two pounds of manure per square foot of bed. Rhubarb also prefers acid soil - the manure will help with that but you may need to add some sulfur to help get it down to or below 7. Rhubarb plants get big so plants need to be 2 to 3 feet apart within a row and rows 4 to 5 feet apart. Or, like the rhubarb patch back home on the farm - planting them on about a 3 foot grid worked pretty well also. My preference is to do it that way so that the leaves pretty well shade out all the ground and you don't have much problems with weeds once it is well established. Crowns are planted shallow - basically just one half to one inch deep. Firm the soil around the crowns but make sure there isn't a depression that will hold water. There are several newer varieties - newer being a relative term here - but recommended varieties include Canada Red, Crimson Red, McDonald and Valentine. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Potato Planting Time!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I am not a big believer in the whole potato planting on St Patrick's day thing. Quite possibly because I grew up in Nebraska and it was just a little bit cooler up there! With that said, the last half of March is a good time for potato planting. But if you don't get it done until the 18th of March or even the 25th, it's no big deal!! Growing up I always had to cut the seed potatoes and boy, each piece better only have 1 eye on it or I was in trouble with Dad. Truth is that it's more important to have seed pieces that have good size, 1.5 to 2 ounces each. That's because when that seed piece starts to sprout and grow it's going to need a good supply of food to develop roots and push that shoot to the soil surface. On average figure 4 pieces per seed potato - bigger potatoes more, smaller potatoes less - but make sure that there's at least one eye on each piece. Cut the seed potatoes several days before planting so that the freshly cut surfaces can seal over or suberize prior to planting. Keep the seed pieces in a warm room for several days to hasten that process. Potatoes should be planted 1 to 2 inches deep and about 8 to 12 inches apart in the row. They will be slow to emerge - 3 to 4 weeks is not uncommon. The most important thing to do with potatoes is to regularly hill up the soil around the plant as it grows. New potatoes are formed off the underground stem which is ABOVE the seed potato piece so you need to pull that soil up to provide more space for potato production and to keep developing potatoes out of the sunshine. Exposed potatoes will turn green and this is not a good thing! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pruning Fruit Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I was at a local residents home recently showing him how to prune fruit trees. While I'm not volunteering to prune anyone's fruit trees, I've still got my own to prune, I get a certain thrill and excitement when I start pruning fruit trees. I guess I sort of enjoy doing it, something I learned and had to do in my youth, but I also view it as a training process and I know that if I do a good job of pruning, AND the weather cooperates, all that fruit will be so worth it! So even though the spring seems to be running a little ahead of normal, don't worry about it - get out there and prune your fruit trees over the next few weeks!

We prune for several reasons. We want to remove poor growth or vegetative growth that doesn't gain you anything. We prune to keep the tree compact so if a heavy fruit crop develops we don't break branches and we don't have to prop up limbs. We prune to control the size of the fruit crop. A tree has the potential to produce x pounds of fruit. So you can have 1,000 stupid little small apples or 200 nice sized juicy apples. We prune to open up the tree to allow better light penetration to all the leaves and to also make it easier to spray. Sprays have to get on the leaves and the apples to protect them and if the apples are covered by leaves we may have problems.

We often prune to keep the tree down to a manageable size. If a tree gets 20 feet tall but we only have a 6 foot stepladder, we're going to have a lot of wasted fruit. So even though buds may be swelling or even though we may not have a fruit crop this year, still get out there and prune your trees! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cut Back Ornamental Grasses

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I see more and more ornamental grasses in landscapes every year. Grasses do well in full sun, they provide color, texture and height in the landscape. They also tend to be pretty drought resistant and most of them are long or moderately long lived perennials. However, they do have a down side. Once they dry down in the fall, they become a fire risk, plain and simple. If they are away from any building that isn't a problem, BUT you still need to get that old dead foliage out of there come late winter or early spring. It simply isn't very attractive to have 6 feet of dead grass with new grass coming up in the middle of it. If you live in town you have no choice but to cut it down. If it's a smaller species of grass this isn't much of a problem. You cut it off an inch or two above the ground you gather it up and throw it in the trash. It often can help if you use twine and tie it tightly together before cutting so you aren't chasing little pieces of grass all over the yard afterwards. If you've got some of the bigger stuff, especially a well established clump of good old pampas grass, you've got a mess. You still want to try to tie it up and then use a chain saw or weed eater or even an electric hedge trimmer to cut it off. Be warned that when dry, this stuff is scratchy and irritating. Wear long sleeves. Now, if you live out in the country, my preferred way of dealing with this stuff, is fire. Make sure you have a burn permit if you are in Geary County and call for permission to burn. And also make sure it isn't too close to your mother in law's pine tree when you light it up! Just sayin'! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Squash Bugs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I had an interesting discussion with a local gardener last week. He loves squash. He loves growing squash. He hates squash bugs. He's in good company. He is an organic gardener and wanted to know what he could do preemptively to prevent squash bugs this year. Well, whether you are an organic gardener or not, there's nothing you can do to prevent squash bugs. Squash bugs are true bugs. They feed by sucking plant juices out of the plant. By the time you get well into the season and start to see huge second generation populations you are in trouble as the massive numbers can literally suck the life out of your squash plants. Working the soil in the fall or late winter can reduce the number of overwintering squash bugs. Also, being a true bug, adults are simply very hard to kill. Same thing goes for chinch bugs and box elder bugs, all in the same order. So it is important that you start control measures early. You don't want large populations of second generation squash bugs to develop. Watch for eggs on the undersides of the leaves and start spraying when you see the first small nymphs. Spray as often as the product you are using will allow. For nymphs, use spinosad, which is an organic approved control. It is very effective against nymphs. Spray up under the leaves with high pressure. Often you can place a small board on the ground near the plants and the bugs will hide under this in the afternoons. Flip it over and spray them! For adults, use cyhalothrin sold as Bonide Beetle Killer, or cyfluthrin sold as Bayer Vegetable and Garden Insect Spray. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.