

Cold Temperatures

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. After last week's weather, I hope you understand why I discourage planting of tomatoes in April or really until Mother's Day weekend. Yes, the weather has been interesting this winter and spring. There is no doubt about that. But a few nice days here and there don't set the tone for the rest of the season. Average last frost date is April 15th. Frost free date is nearly a month later - May 10th. Latest last frost has been May 14th. But it just isn't freezing temperatures, its just plain cold soils. Tomatoes, and peppers and eggplant, especially sweet potatoes, are all tropical plants. They have very little, if any, cold weather tolerance. You put tomatoes in the ground too early and you will shock them. They'll be stunted. They may even turn purple due to failure of the roots to take up nutrients. In some cases you will take a plant that had moved into reproductive mode (meaning it was blooming) and you can shock it back into vegetative mode from which it will take time and a lot of warm weather to get it to start blooming again. I'm sorry to tell you that those water walls you placed around your early planted tomatoes may keep the frost off the leaves, but if it's cloudy and rainy for several days you then have cold water around your tomato doing a good job of keeping it cool for several days afterwards. I know you want the first tomatoes of the season in the neighborhood, but you can't trick mother nature. You've got to wait for the soil to warm up, you've got to wait for the air to warm up before you plant your tomatoes. Mother's Day is coming, you will make it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Will We Have A Fruit Crop

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With so much of the plant growth running well ahead of normal I'm sure that there's a few home orchardists wondering if we will have a fruit crop to speak of this year. Well, based on my own fruit trees, I'd say it's going to be minimal if at all. Everyone's individual location is going to be different so your trees may have been a day later than mine and that would be all it would take. But as I have been looking at my fruit trees, most of the blossoms and the stems are falling off meaning that the bloom was frozen or simply didn't pollinate. I find a few scattered fruit trying to develop but it's too early to tell if they will hang on or not. Now, this damage was not from last weeks nippy weather but from some of the chilly weather we had earlier. Now here is where a lot of people fall down on their home orchard tree care. It doesn't matter whether you have a bumper crop or no crop at all, you need to continue to take care of your tree this year. Take some time to look over your tree carefully to see if there is any fruit. It may still be 3 or 4 weeks before you know for sure and if you do have a decent fruit set - good for you, I'm jealous! If you didn't get your trees pruned much this spring and find excessive growth, you can go ahead and prune in June. You want to treat with fungicides and if you have peach trees definitely continue to treat for borers. If it gets dry, keep the trees well watered. This is because, with no fruit load this year, your tree will be producing a lot of flower buds in late July and August. The better care you give it, the more buds you'll have. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Mesotrione

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When people are planting a new lawn, we encourage doing this in the fall so we don't have to worry about excessive competition from crabgrass. While we've always said that you can't use crabgrass preventers on new grass plantings in the spring, there was an exception for a product called Tupersan. But I never talked about it much because it didn't work very well. This year, or at least I just became aware of it this year, there is a new player in the market. I've seen it advertised as starter food for new grass and weed preventer. It's a basic starter fertilizer with the active ingredient of mesotrione.

Mesotrione has been around in crop production for nearly ten years. The product works as a basic seedling weed control product with about six weeks of residual activity. This stuff isn't going to last all summer long like Barricade or Dimension, but you can apply it when you seed a new lawn in the spring. But here's the interesting thing - while it is okay as a crabgrass preventer and other weedy grasses, it's even better as a postemerge weed and grass killer. The active ingredient is found in a commercial product called Tenacity that you can probably find on the internet. This herbicide will control two troublesome weeds that I see periodically, windmill grass and nimblewill - both perennial weeds. It will also control fairly large crabgrass as well as many of the broadleaf weeds we are always fighting. It is not labeled for zoysia or Bermudagrass but is for other common turf species include buffalograss. If used on existing grass, it may bleach it for a while but it should be okay! 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. One of the ongoing problem weeds that we deal with around our homes, yards and gardens is field bindweed. Field bindweed is a very deep rooted perennial. Once a plant is a couple of years old it can have roots over 5 feet deep and extending out over 10 feet in all directions. This massive root system essentially rules out mechanical control or hand pulling. The plant just breaks off and grows back from the root. There was a study done that showed that if you pulled or hoed the plant off, then waiting for new growth to show up and then waited 17 days and repeated it, that in 3 or 4 years you could actually kill the plant. Okay, I'm not going to wait that long! In gardens, probably the best control is glyphosate. During the growing season, let the vines get about one foot long, pull them away from desirable plants and carefully spray it with glyphosate. Just keep at it and you will control the bindweed. You can wait until fall and just let the vines grow and grow and then spray after all plants are harvested. In yards, repeated treatments with dandelion type killers will work. But for maximum effect find one that also lists crabgrass control and see if it has the active ingredient quinclorac. While quinclorac is a crabgrass killer, it is also very active on bindweed, possibly the most active herbicide for bindweed control that we have. If you do use a product containing quinclorac on your yard do not use these clippings for mulch. Quinclorac is very stable as a residue on clippings and can cause damage to sensitive plants like tomatoes and shrubs! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Sweet Corn Primer

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Hopefully some of that cold cloudy rainy wet weather is gone and we can focus on getting caught up with our gardens. I got some carrots in the ground before this last round and want to get several more waves planted - you can't beat fresh carrots. But more importantly, you can't beat fresh sweet corn. Sweet corn isn't always best planted in small gardens. For adequate pollination look at planting at least six rows wide and a minimum of 25 foot long rows. Then fertilize the living daylight out of it! Sweet corn used to be easy - get some Iochief or Golden Bantam, plant it and harvest it. But then they started coming out with supersweet varieties then sugar enhanced and now triplesweet. The additional challenge is that you need to be careful where you plant these. The standard varieties include hybrids like Honey and Cream or Silver Queen. These need to be isolated from ANY other kind of corn by 250 feet of distance or 12 to 14 days difference in tasseling. The supersweets while sweeter, tend to have tougher kernels and that has been a drawback. They need the same 250 feet distance spacing to prevent dilution of the supersweet gene. The sugar enhanced are likely the most popular ones out there and only need to be separated from supersweet hybrids. Popular varieties include Bodacious, Ambrosia, Sweet Temptation and Delectable. The triple sweets combine genes from all three of the other types. They are still so new we don't have a lot of recommendations but consider trying Serendipity, Polka, Avalon or Frisky! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.