

Planting Spring Bulbs

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 best things about spring flowering bulbs is that unless the ground freezes solid or gets buried under snow within the next six weeks, you still have plenty of time to get things like tulips, daffodils and other spring flowering bulbs planted. Ideally you still want soil temperatures in the planting zone to be 40 degrees or above so that some roots will develop this fall. As of the end of last week soil temperatures in the planting zone were still in the mid 50s so you've got a lot of time to get this things planted. The standard bulbs that we all think of for spring blooms are pretty forgiving and tolerant of even fairly poor soils EXCEPT for poorly drained soils. Don't plant them in an area of your yard where water stands after every rain. If you have really have clay soils, mix in generous amounts of organic matter such as peat moss, well rotted manure, compost or partially composted leaves. Mix this into the soil below and above where you plant the bulbs. I always like to mix a little bone meal into the bottom of the planting hole for a good slow release phosphorus source in the root zone and then use a basic lawn fertilizer, without weed killers, at the rate of 2/3 pound per 100 square feet over the top after planting, or use 5 to 10 pounds of blood meal or 10 pounds of cottonseed meal. These are both good slow release nitrogen sources. Read the labels and make sure you are planting the bulbs at the proper depth. If you aren't sure call me, or you can use the general guideline of planting the bulbs 2 to 3 times the size of the bulb. In general, you can't plant 'em too deep! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Leave the Leaves

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With freezes hitting the area, fewer hours of daylight and colder weather promised, we are starting that annual struggle of what to do with tree leaves in the yard. I frequently tell people that the wind does blow in Kansas and if you wait long enough they'll just blow on down the street. But then a few days later the wind switches direction and the leaves come right back to you. The best way to deal with leaves is to shred them with your lawn mower, leave them on the yard and let them break down. They are a valuable source of nutrients and this is recycling at its finest! If you get a very deep layer or they get matted down with ice or snow, they can be an issue though and smother areas of grass. If you feel the urge to get them off the lawn, go ahead and bag them up with your mower and put them in the compost pile. This is also a handy way to take them directly to a garden or flower bed where you can work all of this great material into the soil. The great thing about using the mower is you get a nice combination of grass clippings and leaves. The moist high nitrogen grass leaves and dry high carbon leaves are a great combo for the compost pile. If you don't have a compost pile it's a great way to start one! While it is sometimes necessary to send them to the trash or put them in a pile to burn I really only want to do this as a last resort. The nutrients that grew those leaves came from the soil in your yard and the fertilizer that you probably applied to the grass, originally. Don't waste those valuable nutrients, recycle them as much as possible! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Clean up Those Iris Beds

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The days are much shorter, or so it seems with daylight savings time over, and weather is getting colder but there are still tasks to be done out in the yard and garden. If you haven't cut down your peonies, it's best to do this in the fall. Those leaf diseases that we fight every year overwinter on old plant material. If you leave that material out there, you've got a ready source for re-infection next year. So cut the plants off at ground level and carefully remove them. You can wait until spring, but more leaf material falls off over the winter so you don't get it all. Remove them now, and winter winds will help blow a lot of the residual material out of the peony bed. It also helps the peonies to stay productive if you rake off a little of the soil from the tops of the clumps and then sprinkle a general purpose fertilizer over them. Bearded iris are also susceptible to a couple of issues that can be helped with a fall cleanup. Iris leaf spot and iris borer are two pests that overwinter in old foliage. Take the time to clean off all the old dead leaves and cut the new leaves back to about ½ the height this fall. Then be sure to get that material out of the iris bed - don't compost it, burn it or trash it. Before anyone asks, no, don't just mow over the top of the iris bed. Mowers shred material and by this time of year the mower blade isn't very sharp soooo, your tearing the iris leaf blade, not cutting it cleanly. The shredded parts of the leaf drop back down and the ragged cut is more likely to have other problems. Cut cleanly, get it out of there and clean up any other debris that's in the bed area!

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Putting Small Engines Away for Winter

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Often by the middle of November, the lawn hasn't seen a lawn mower for 3 or 4 weeks. Eventually you will need to tuck your lawnmower away for the winter. Ideally, you don't just push it into the garage or storage shed and utter a thank goodness that's over with for another year. No, you want to clean up your lawn mower and get it ready for when you need it next spring. This would be a good time to change the oil and air filter. You can either drain the gas or use a gasoline stabilizer. Fuels now days are much higher quality, but a gasoline stabilizer is probably still a good idea. Clean up all the dirt and grease off the mower. Clean out under the mower deck. Take off the blade and sharpen it. If your mower has belts to power the blades, give them a good check over to see if they are in good shape or starting to develop a lot of cracks. If the belt is looking worn, order a new one now so it's on hand BEFORE you actually need it. Replace the spark plug with a new one. But before you put the new plug in, squirt a little oil into the cylinder and turn the engine over a couple of times to get the cylinder walls, rings and pistons well lubricated. Then put the plug back in. Before you put the mower blades back on, wipe them down with an oily rag to protect from rust over the winter. If your mower has a battery, it's a good idea to remove it and set it on a piece of cardboard or a board. This seems to help it go through the winter better. Of course, if you don't want to do all of this, there are businesses that do it for you. But get your mower ready for spring, now. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Why Herbicide Applications Fail

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I routinely visit with homeowners about weed control in their lawns and we'll often start talking about what worked and what didn't work. One of the biggest problems that I run into is that a wrong herbicide was used because the homeowner didn't understand what weed they were trying to kill or what herbicide works on what weeds. When it comes to weed control you have to remember that there are broadleaf plants, things like dandelions, and grass plants, things like crabgrass or even fescue and bluegrass which we are trying to grow. These two groups of plants have very different biochemical pathways and with the exception of herbicides that contain glyphosate, like Roundup and Kleenup, a chemical that kills a broadleaf plant usually isn't going to work on a grass plant. But even within those two groups of plants we have differences between cool season and warm season plants. A grass like crabgrass may be well controlled by quinclorac but Bermudagrass or nimblewill won't be phased by it. Know what weed you're trying to kill and which herbicide will work best on that. Another common problem is application error and this encompasses a lot of issues. If plants are drought stressed, herbicides won't work very well. If the temperatures are too cold, usually below 50 degrees, at application time, the plants aren't growing well and herbicides are much less effective. The biggest problem is failure to apply enough chemical. Mixing rates are often in ounces per so many square feet, but homeowners mix it up by the gallon and don't apply enough! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.