

Webworms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I've been seeing increasing numbers of webworm which is what I'd expect this time of year. Webworms are those caterpillars that feed out on the ends of branches and enclose large areas of the branch tips in a big webby mess. This webbing protects them from predators and insecticidal sprays so that they can feed fairly unmolested. These webby masses will often stay on the tree clear into next spring. Eventually the caterpillars will reach full size, leave the webbing and move down to the base of the tree where they will overwinter as a pupa. They will emerge as a small unimpressive moth in the spring when they will mate and lay eggs. What you are seeing right now is actually the second generation. The first generation is much smaller population and easily overlooked. So here's what you need to do - nothing! The webby masses are annoying and look bad but they really aren't doing serious damage to the tree. The amount of leaf area lost is so nominal and the trees already have the food reserves stored up that they need. The leaves are getting ready to start falling off already anyway. The sight of those masses bugs you, but isn't harmful to the tree. What is harmful are all the things that homeowners try to do to deal with them. People will lop off the ends of branches to get rid of the bags. They'll use torches and burn the webby masses up. Some people will spend a lot of money to have companies come in and spray with high power equipment. You don't have to do anything. In fact the tree is better off if you don't do anything. Just ignore them and go watch TV! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Peonies

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If you are tired of your peonies looking all tattered and covered with leaf spots or powdery mildew it is now late enough in the season that you can cut them down. HOWEVER you can not go over them with a lawn mower to do it! Those leaf spots that you hate overwinter on those leaves that are infected right now. When you mow the peonies down you shred those leaves up and scatter them all over the area. Even if you try to rake them up, you're only getting part of the leaves. There's all sorts of leaf material snuggling nicely down in the grass or the mulch that will overwinter and then be there next spring to release spores to infect next year's new growth. Additionally, the lawn mower leaves 2 to 3 inches of ugly little tattered stub at the ground. Not attractive at all. You want to go in with hand pruners, carefully cut everything off at ground level and then carefully put it in a container and haul it away to a burn barrel, a burn pile or the trash. Get it out of the area and destroyed. Next you want to take a rake out and rake down the top of each plant to level it up and keep the soil from getting too deep over the top of the plants which ultimately will stop them from blooming. Unlike daylilies, peonies don't need to be regularly divided to keep them blooming. But if you want to move or divide peonies, now is the time to do it. Dig them up, divide with an axe if you want to increase them. Be sure to locate the pink buds or eyes on the crowns. They are very visible. Find these because you only want these about 1 inch below the soil surface. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Time to Plant the Grass

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It is September - if you want to do any overseeding or total reseeding, this is the month to do it. Okay, to be right honest you can plant grass in many different months, but here's why I like to plant grass in early September. First of all, the soil is still warm so you will get fairly rapid germination of the grass seed. The weather is also cooling off, which is good for the fescue and bluegrass, and we usually get some nice rainfall in September. But if we don't the cooler weather allows the soil to stay wetter longer when you irrigate. Once the grass starts growing it will hopefully put on some good early fall growth. We ideally want to get the grass mowed at least three times, at normal mowing height, by late October. The clipping action from mowing actually encourages the grass plant to tiller more which thickens up the stand. But once it's gotten tall enough to be mowed three times, it also means the plant has enough age and size to tolerate the herbicides that we use to control those little broadleaf weeds that will be coming up soon and will bloom next spring if we don't control them now. The other reason you want to get that grass planted sooner is that you want it to develop a good root system to keep it anchored through the winter. As soil freezes and thaws it can push plants that aren't well rooted right out of the ground. Once the plant starts to move up, the crown of the that little grass plant gets pushed up out of the soil and just a half inch up out of the soil will allow that grass crown to freeze and worse, dry out, which is what winterkill really is! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Power Raking vs. Core Aeration

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Two things that homeowners often hear from lawn management companies or even from county agents is that they need to think about power raking and core aerating their lawns. The homeowners nod like they understand yet they don't have a clue why OR they do it for the wrong reasons or at the wrong time. Homeowner probably do far too much power raking and not nearly enough core aerating. Power raking is designed to break up mulch layers that develop under a stand of grass on top of the soil surface. Machines with spinning rods or knives slice or tear down through the mulch layer to the soil surface and lift this material up where it can be removed. If there is a serious mulch problem it will look like you were haying the lawn. I rarely see serious mulch problems in lawns. Core aerating punches holes into the soil and pulls those cores of soil up on the top of the grass. This can help with thatch layers but more importantly it creates space where the soil can expand. This helps deal with compaction which is a serious issue especially on lawns with sprinkler systems and large riding lawn mowers. If you are trying to raise soil pH with lime or trying to correct a major phosphorus deficiency these open cores that are about 3 inches deep in the soil provide a way to get the lime or phosphorus fertilizer down below the soil surface. We have many lawns that would benefit greatly from core aerating. Either one of these operations are best done in early September. The grass is growing well at this time and the lawn can recover if you will as we head into late fall!

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Pokeweed vs Elderberry

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It may be hard to believe but I get asked some really odd questions at times. The weirdest are from the people that seem to have this obsession with attempting to eat all sorts of things growing in the wild. While I don't necessarily understand this, I try to help them out, or at least try to keep them from eating something that they shouldn't. Two plants that routinely cause confusion with each other are elderberry and pokeweed. At this time of year you can find both growing around here and both have purple berries. Elderberries are fine to eat, pokeweed is mildly poisonous. It probably won't kill you, but you likely won't feel well! Pokeweed has larger berries and they are borne on a long stem. Think of a finger with berries coming off all around the finger. It reminds me of the way that chokecherries bear fruit. Elderberries are smaller and are borne on a sort of umbrella shaped structure. Elderberry clumps can be quite large - 4 to 6 inches across. Both are perennial plants but pokeweed dies down to the ground every year. The base of the plant will be red or green. Elderberry is a shrub so the base of an elderberry plant will look woody. If you understand a little bit about plant taxonomy - pokeweed has simple leaves, elderberry has compound leaves. If you google both on the internet there are many very good and distinctive pictures of each. Both grow wild around the area. In fact I've seen some elderberries with very good fruit crops this year, but they are going fast as the birds love them too so you'd better get out and pick some soon! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.