

Why Don't We Plant Tomatoes Early

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many gardeners tend to think that we don't plant tomatoes early because frost may nip them or kill them. Okay, frost is the least of my worries.

We can use things like row covers or the infamous walls of water, and keep frost physically off the plant. But the potential problem goes much deeper than that, literally. Tomatoes are a subtropical plant. They are not frost tolerant and they simply don't like cold weather. When tomatoes are planted into cold soil it will shock them. If tomatoes are planted in somewhat warm soil that then cools down, it will shock them. Tomatoes need soil temperatures of 60 degrees or above and it needs to stay there. Remember a weekend ago when we had three days of 80 degrees followed by snow and cold. Soil temperatures at 4 p.m. on Friday the 13th were up to 67 degrees and 36 hours later the soil temperature hit 40. There is nothing you can do in your garden to protect against those kinds of wild weather swings. When tomatoes are exposed to that kind of chilling the shock can first of all cause them to literally turn purple due to some funny things that start happening with plant nutrients. But more importantly, that same shock causes tomatoes to stay in vegetative growth mode longer. Even if you had planted tomatoes that were starting to bloom, the plant will switch back to vegetative growth stage and it will take a lot of heat and time to get it to start flowering again. Be patient. Keep those tomatoes inside until Mother's Day weekend! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Puncturevine Control

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A couple of weeks ago we talked about sandburs - the kind that look like grass and you don't notice it until the multi-spined burs wind up in your shoe laces. Today we're talking about puncturevine which is the plant that has a single taproot, spreads out in all directions, has pretty little yellow flowers and has one or two really thick and long spines. These are the ones that flatten bicycle or mower tires and end up in your shoes, just about requiring pliers to get them pulled out. In most lawn settings, puncturevine is not a problem. But around gardens, flowerbeds, walking paths, just about any place with little vegetative competition and full sun - this weed can be a big problem. One plant can grow to be over 8 feet across and can produce 500 to 2000 seeds. Where you've had puncturevine before you will have it again. Because it is a prolific seed producer, you need to learn to identify the plant when it is small and pull it or hoe it, if there are just a few, or treat it with a post emerge lawn herbicide. It has small little compound leaves, which means it has 6 to 8 tiny leaflets making up one leaf. It can start to bloom just three weeks following germination and can continue to bloom and set seed all summer long. Get it while it is small. Any of our lawn weed herbicides with 2,4-D or dicamba will be very effective. If you want information on how to identify this as a small plant, just give me a call or look it up on the internet, there's lot of photos there! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bagworm time yet????

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. No, no, no! It is still way too early to spray for bagworms yet. No, the cold weather hasn't done anything to hurt them. I don't know how many times I've said this and people still get confused. Bagworms are the insects that feed on junipers and have the little bag that is camouflaged with foliage of whatever plant they are feeding on. The insects that make the big webby masses on the ends of tree branches in the fall are webworms. They are not really a threat to the health of the tree. Bagworms will kill a juniper if left uncontrolled. Bagworms don't really have an effective natural control. It's up to you to deal with them. Right now they are still overwintering as eggs inside of the bag that the female lived in last year. In late May and early June - again, in late May and early June, these eggs will hatch. The small caterpillars will crawl out of the bag, start to feed and very soon spin their first little bag and decorate it with pieces of foliage. At this time those little bags are only about a quarter inch long. They are easy to overlook. If your juniper had bagworms last year, even if you treated, treat again this year. Two treatments applied about June 10th and again on June 25th works very well. Using a hose end sprayer so you can apply enough product that it is starting to drip off the foliage is necessary. Many products today come in their own hose end sprayer so you don't have to mix a thing. If you have a lot of big trees, you may very well have to hire a professional to get it done! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Be ready for apple leaf disease control

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Apple trees, both fruit apple and flowering crabapple, can get hammered with two different foliage diseases: cedar apple rust and apple scab. Rust is a problem early in the season, from now through late May. Scab can come along at any time. Certain varieties are susceptible, others are quite resistant. If you've had problems with apple tree leaves getting spots or defoliating in the past, then you have one or both diseases. For apples, heavy leaf disease infection will reduce number, size and quality of the fruit. In both fruit apples and flower crabs, year after year of infection will reduce vigor of the tree and lead to premature death. Fungicide treatments need to start to be applied once the apple leaves start to emerge. Myclobutanil, sold as Immunox, is labeled for both apples and crabapples and is effective against both rust and scab. Other products are effective on one disease or the other or may be effective against both but can only be used on crabapples - chlorothalonil falls into that category. You need to apply a thorough soaking spray to cover all the foliage. This needs to be done on a 7 to 10 day cycle. If we start to get rain showers, both diseases, but especially rust, will get busy and you'll probably need to spray every 7 days. Cedar apple rust, by the way, comes from those funny orange jelly fish looking growths we see on cedar trees following rain storms in the spring. The best long term solution is to plant apples or crabapples that are resistant to both diseases. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pruning spring flowering shrubs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This is becoming a really fun spring - a little strange, but isn't every season in Kansas a little bit different? I sense a real bottled up amount of energy from many gardeners that I've been talking to. People are so ready to get going in the yard and garden - I call it the busy bee syndrome. They have to be doing something!! But this is where wisdom, patience and experience have to control bottled up energy! For some reason spring flowering shrubs often become the first target of this energy. The problem is, we grow spring flowering shrubs, most commonly, for their spring flowers. Those spring flowers come from buds that were generated by the plant late summer of last year. Those plants only make flower buds one time. If, between the time the buds are created and they would normally bloom, something happens, like an unusual freeze event, or someone pruning them off, the shrub won't bloom. Forsythia's had some abbreviated blooming this year because of some of that cold weather. Spirea and lilacs are gearing up now and hopefully are still okay. All of this is to say, don't prune these spring flowering shrubs until AFTER they get through blooming. Once the blooms have faded go out and prune and trim that shrub back, usually to slightly smaller than you'd like it. You want to remove the old blossoms and encourage it to create new woody growth as that's where the plant will form it's new flower buds later this summer. Feel free to fertilize it also! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.