

Gardening with Chuck for April 30 - May 6, 2018

Now that it's rained, a little

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In a six day period last week we finally got some rain - almost an inch worth. IF you had applied fertilizer and crabgrass preventer to your yard ahead of that, like I fortunately had, then the rain got it nicely activated. If you didn't get your crabgrass preventer on yet, get it done because the crabgrass is likely germinating by now and we may need to apply some post-emerge crabgrass killer. But a word of warning - get the mower blade sharpened because the grass is going to be exploding over the next few days as the weather warms up. In fact a lot of plants are going to be exploded. It's been a long time since we've had this late of a spring. Season compression will cause plants to just explode now that we've had the rain and some more warm weather. If you have apples of flowering crabs that have issues with leaf diseases you need to be spraying NOW. By the time that rain was ending last Wednesday I was already seeing cedar apple rust galls on the cedar trees. Rust infection on apple leaves is beginning so get the Immunox applied! Once the soil has dried so you don't make a lot of clods, start getting your late April and early May garden vegetables planted. Still about a week to ten days early for tomatoes, but a lot of other things can go in the ground. For flowers and bedding plants, you can start getting those planted now as well. We may not be out of the woods on frost risk, but I think it's worth a chance. We're all ready for spring to get here and stay, and it's about to happen! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Issues with aging evergreens

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 recently called out to a residential property to look at a blue spruce. The homeowners were concerned because this large stately tree was starting to get gappy looking in the bottom. What we were seeing in this tree was essentially age. We are very used to evergreens having this nice pyramidal shape with foliage evenly all the way around. But we never really look at how these trees grow out in their native settings. There were no insect or disease issues with this blue spruce. The gappiness, if that's a word, that we were seeing is typical with any evergreen that has reached a mature stage. As evergreens grow their rate of growth slows down. If you ever get "inside" the green shell foliage of an evergreen you'll see that it is essentially hollow. All the growth of evergreens occurs on the ends of the branches. Once needles are 3 or 4 years old they are usually so shaded that the needles die and fall off. If a less aggressive branch gets shaded out, it'll die. If another tree provides too much shade, the shaded branches die out. It's very natural. So as these lower limbs age they get large, they get heavy and they sag. As they sag you start to get gaps and through those gaps you will see all the old dead branches that the tree has self pruned. Nobody ever said aging was kind to our looks or the looks of plants. You can cut those branches off if you wish, just be sure to cut them off back to the main trunk to allow healing of the pruning cut. And be sure to water them in dry weather. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fertilizing Strawberries and brambles

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 things that busy bee gardeners want to do as they get out and about in the spring is to fertilize. They get so wrapped up they will fertilize everything in sight given half a chance. Unfortunately, while many things do respond well to spring fertilization, it really isn't for everything. Equally important for many things, is to know when to do a follow up fertilization. Brambles, which for us mainly means raspberries and blackberries do need to be fertilized in the spring when new growth begins. This fertilization will encourage the brambles to put on new growth this year and it is this new growth that will produce the berries next year. Generally they need high nitrogen fertilizers like we see in lawn fertilizers, just make sure there's no weed killers in the fertilizer. Apply about a half cup of fertilizer for ever ten feet of row. Everbearing strawberries can also use a fertilization in the spring as new growth begins. But June bearing strawberries should never be fertilized in the spring as it can make berries soft and prone to rot. Fertilize at renovation time, following the bearing season, and then again in late August or early September. As long as you don't have a soil test showing that you need nitrogen, and soil testing strawberry beds every 3 to 4 years is a good idea, then use the same high nitrogen fertilizers, without weed killer, also at about ½ cup per 10 row feet. If you do need phosphorus then use a 10-10-10 or 12-12-12 at the rate of 1½ cups per 10 feet of row. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Orchardgrass

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Several times every growing season I will have homeowners bring in this clumpy coarse grass that they have growing in their yard. It is growing faster than all their other grasses, it tends to splay out at the base so it takes up a lot of space, it tends to have a very flat stem at the base and it is a paler green than their tall fescue. This is orchardgrass and you don't want it in your yard. It commonly comes into yards as seed contamination in tall fescue seed, usually low priced tall fescue seed. You won't see it listed as a weed because technically it is a forage grass. When you buy tall fescue seed pay close attention to the label and make sure that where it says "other crop seed", it is listed as 0% other crop seed. Even a few tenths of a percent of other crop seed is way more orchardgrass seed than you want in your yard. Unfortunately there is no way to selectively kill orchardgrass in a fescue or bluegrass yard. You are destined to live with it, spot spray the individual clumps with glyphosate or in a worst case scenario, you spray the whole yard in late summer with glyphosate to kill everything and then start over with high quality seed. If you spot spray, carefully apply the glyphosate to just the orchardgrass clump. Once it's brown and dead you can cut it out and replace it with a chunk of turf from somewhere else, or just remove it, fill in the divet with soil and then overseed the spots in the fall. As the spring progresses it will be less obvious, but it'll still be there next year! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What do those numbers mean?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Speaking fertilizers to a lot of homeowners I frequently get these looks that make me feel like I'm speaking a foreign language to them. Part of this is because fertilizer is described with numbers and we tend to have a very high level of math anxiety in our country! All fertilizer, by law, has to have an analysis of what nutrients it has in it. These nutrient levels are expressed as a percent. The big letters always have to indicate the percent nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, in that order. If there are other nutrients, like sulfur or iron or manganese or a whole host of other nutrients, they will be in smaller print somewhere on the label. A fertilizer that is 10-10-10 has 10% nitrogen, 10% phosphorus and 10% potassium by weight. A ten pound bag would have 1 pound each of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. If you only need nitrogen, this would be a waste of money as you don't need the other nutrients. But if we don't know what our soil contains, it's often safer to use something like this. Lawns need a lot of nitrogen so lawn fertilizers will often be high in nitrogen say something like a 27-3-3. As a general rule of thumb, we fertilize most all plants at the rate of one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. We may do this several times in a growing season but only a pound per 1,000 at a time. As to all those micronutrients and other things that are in some of the high dollar speciality fertilizers - unless you are growing something in a pot, you likely don't need 'em. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.