

Cold Weather and Plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It got a bit chilly last week and over the weekend. What all the impacts are going to be is yet to be seen. In fact it might take until the end of this week or longer to really know for sure. The one thing we have working in our favor is the fact that March had been a pretty average March and many plants were still holding their dormancy better than in recent years. Some of the ornamental pears had flowers that got frosted. We'll know how bad when we get some of those warmer temperatures later this week. Needless to say, their blooming this year is going to be less than spectacular. Once again, apricots came out early as they always do and if anyone gets any apricots on their trees, it'll be a miracle. Other fruit trees will be touch and go. My apple trees had been holding pretty tight bud but if you get into the mid to lower teens in early April, it's liable to cause some loss of blossoms. We likely won't know for another month or so. Because of the level of cold that we were blasted with, if you had turned on your lawn irrigation system, you may want to have the company come and check it to make sure that nothing was damaged by ice buildup. For everyone that HAD to have their potatoes planted by St Patrick's Day, this is yet another classic example of why I'm not a fan of that tradition. The soil has actually been cooling off in recent days. Not many shade trees had been leafing out but some of those buds may get nipped - but leaf buds are easy to replace! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

How Low Can You Go

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 had been in a hurry and already gone out and mowed your lawn off low, you may regret having done that. I'll be surprised if we don't see some frozen leaves on some of those greener lawns. If you had already mowed off that dead winter grass, don't set the lawn mower lower and do it again. Just suffer through the next couple of weeks until the grass has grown enough to be mowed normally. If you mow it too low you will start scalping crowns and that does several bad things for you. One of the best weed preventers we have is to keep the lawn thick so that the ground is shaded. Many weed seeds need sunlight to germinate and grow. If you mow a lawn too short, fescue especially, you will start to make it clumpy. Under no circumstances should you ever mow fescue lower than 1½ inches tall. Kentucky bluegrass can be mowed one inch tall. But that is just one time at the very start of the season. After that one mowing, immediately move the cutting height back up to 2 to 3 inches for bluegrass and 3 to 3½ inches for fescue. If you hadn't gotten your crabgrass preventer applied, now would be a good time to do that. Soil temperatures have been cool so the summer annual grasses like crabgrass and foxtail are not growing yet. But with a warm up predicted it's going to start getting the germination process started before too long. Finally, cold temperatures like this can sometimes cause strange patterns to show up on your lawn. Don't worry, it'll soon grow out of it. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Grass Sandburs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Grass sandburs are devious little rascals. Far too many people don't know they have them until the first spiny seed capsules show up in their shoelaces, pant legs or pet fur. By then, it's too late. One good thing to know is that where you had them last year, you will have them this year. Remember, I'm talking about grass sandburs. This is the plant that looks like another grass plant until it puts on seeds. The plant that hugs the ground and can be several feet across with the seed capsules that have a long and very heavy duty thorn on it is puncturevine and we'll talk about it in a few weeks. Sandburs, like crabgrass, are a summer annual plant. The plant died last fall with freezing weather and starts all over this spring from a seed that sprouts and starts growing. The good news is that many of our crabgrass preventers will provide some assistance in helping to knock the population down. Make sure that areas that had sandburs last year don't get missed when you are spreading crabgrass preventer. In fact, if your product will let you, read the label, apply a second application 6 to 8 weeks after the first. But don't stop there. About once a month, starting the first part of June, treat with one of the crabgrass postemerge killers. Look for a product that has words crabgrass killer on the label. These products work best on smaller grassy weeds, like sandburs. Apply a good soaking spray following the label directions about once a month from June through September for enhanced control. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Brown Junipers

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 the time of year that some people become concerned because their junipers start to turn brown. The first thing to do is to see if the brown is limited to the tips of the branches with nice green foliage behind that. If so, I'll discuss that in more detail shortly. If entire branches are turning brown and there is no green foliage left, it was killed by something. I've seen a few cases this early spring where parts of junipers are turning almost yellow green and I'm not sure what's going on there. But sometimes, because of winter damage, rodent feeding, old mechanical injury, even excessive shade, that branches just up and die. If it's one or two branches, cut them out - if it's a lot of dead foliage, call me so I can look at it. Now, if the brown seems to be just little brown buds on the ends of branches, with plenty of green foliage behind it, here's what's going on. Junipers have separate male and female plants. They are what's called dioecious, literally meaning, two houses. The junipers that have all the little brown tips are male junipers and those are their flower buds. In a few more weeks these little flowers will start to release clouds of yellow pollen. The female flowers are very inconspicuous. The male flowers are on the ends of the branch tips, the female flowers are sort of tucked back on the branch a little ways from the end. After the male flowers bloom those brown tips will dry up and fall off and the tree or shrub will likely put on new green growth and look fine! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fruit on Ornamental Pears

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When we first started to plant Bradford pears in the 1970s they were wonderful because they never set any fruit. The reason for this was very simple. Virtually all pear trees, ornamental or fruit pears, need to be cross pollinated. And they can't be pollinated by another pear of it's own kind. Since Bradfords were the only ornamental pear around, and not very many people grow fruit pears, the trees bloomed but nothing pollinated them. Over the years, in an effort to fix some structural problems that Bradford pears have, new cultivars were developed that were genetically enough different that once they became common in the trade, sometime in the late 1990s, we suddenly started to see fruit developing on our ornamental pears. If the tree was over your lawn it wasn't a big deal as the small hard fruit fell on the ground and rotted. If the tree hung over a driveway or sidewalk though, you had a mess when the fruit started falling off. Worse yet, the birds love the fruit, eat it readily, and then plant the seeds everywhere that they lift their tail. The seeds are very fertile and will sprout and grow readily. They will sprout and grow so readily that they are becoming an invasive nuisance plant in many natural areas. Other than a series of hard freezes during the bloom time, we don't have a lot options. We may be able to reduce fruit load with applications of the insecticide Sevin. But it needs to be applied shortly after blooming to be successful. If you are interested in trying this, call me. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.