

Resetting Peonies

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Last week I talked about cutting back peonies that were looking pretty sad by now. But the next step this fall is to divide or reset peonies that have gotten too big or aren't blooming well. I normally wait for October to do this just to let the weather cool down, but peonies can be reset or divided anytime after the first of September. One of the principle reasons to reset peonies is because they have acquired too much soil over the crown making the eyes, or new growth buds too deep. This is the reason that peonies don't bloom or slowly reduce blooming. I've got some peonies at the farm that I planted about 30 years ago and I need to reset them this fall. I took pictures of them at blooming time to help me remember which plants they are. Time will tell if I get them done this year or not. We have a great bulletin on peonies at the Extension Office and I would encourage you to pick up a copy. Basically you want to carefully spade around the peony plant to lift it out of the ground. Peonies that have been in the ground for quite a few years, like mine have been, can develop massive root systems so you'll get a work out. Once you get it out of the ground locate the growth buds or eyes on the crown. Trust me, they'll be easy to find. You want these eyes to be 1 to 2 inches below the soil surface. I always shoot for one inch. Reset the plant, backfill with soil and water it down well. If dividing, once you get it out of the ground, cut the crown apart into good sized roots and replant. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Your Problem Probably Isn't Your Soil

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I visit with a lot of homeowners that are having lawn problems. They bring in soil samples or want to bring in soil samples because they have bare spots in their yards or the grass they plant starts out well and then dies out during the summer. As we visit or I wind up doing an onsite visit, 95% of the time the problem is not the soil, it's sunshine. Or to be more specific, it's lack of sunshine. Grass is a plant of the sun. You don't see grass growing in forests because of all the shade. Grass needs several hours of direct sunlight every day. It can get by on a few hours if there is bright indirect sunlight or what we might call filtered sunlight. I can tell you that over the past 30 years I've planted and grown trees in my yard and as the trees have grown and the shade has gotten denser, the grass gets thinner and less vigorous. I've started letting groundcovers take over in a couple of locations. In other locations, just this summer I did some tree trimming. If it is a shady area that is protected from the southwest summer winds, you could try the true fine leaf fescues like creeping red fescue. They do have more shade tolerance than tall fescue, but they are far less tolerant of summers like we've been having with dry conditions and scorching temperatures. If the fine leaf fescues can't make it you have two choices: cut down the trees or start planting groundcovers. I cherish the shade from my trees so in my case, I've usually opted for the ground covers. But that's your decision. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dividing Iris

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Bearded iris are well suited to Kansas. They tend to be tough, they are pretty reliable for good spring blossoms and they survive our heat and occasional droughts. But they do tend to multiply readily. Right now they are semi dormant so it's a good time to divide them, or move them. Carefully dig up the entire clump and remove the dirt. You want to look for thick rhizomes with a good fan of leaves. The ideal situation is to have two small rhizomes attached to a larger rhizome in a Y shape. Each of these rhizomes should have a fan of leaves. Double fans will produce more flowers the first year, but single fans will catch up by the second year. Rhizomes that show issues or mechanical damage should be discarded. Once you get all the rhizomes divided, cut the leaves back by two thirds. Then set these aside in a cool dry place where they won't dry out excessively while you get the bed prepared for replanting by removing weeds and grass and fertilizing. Add 1 pound of a 12-12-12 fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed and work into the soil. If you have been fertilizing heavily in recent years you may just skip fertilizing. When replanting, the tops of the rhizomes should be about even with the soil surface and then water the bed down well, possibly also adding a garden weed preventer. You may need to prewater your iris bed prior to digging to get it diggable if it's dry. You should plan to divide your iris every 3 to 5 years, but they will bloom for years regardless. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Elm Leaf Beetles

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As if the poor elm trees weren't having enough issues this year with the crazy bagworms, which have pretty well run their course by now, we were also seeing a little damage earlier in the summer from the recently discovered elm flea weevil, but then a pest that I haven't hardly seen in over 30 years reappears, the elm leaf beetle. Most of the damage is done by the larvae that effectively skeletonize the leaves eating the green out of them and leaving a lacy skeleton behind. While they will feed on virtually any species of elm they seem to have a strong preference for Siberian elms which most people call Chinese elms or another name that I can't say on the radio. There are two generations per year and we are into the second generation. Back in the mid 1980s we had a couple of tough years with this critter which seems to have coincided with a dry period as well. While the damage can look bad they won't kill a tree. The adult beetle is about the size of a slender lady bug and are yellow and green striped. You may see a few trying to come into your homes this fall. The larvae are yellowish-green and brown striped and will get about 1/3 inch long. You'll find them on the undersides of leaves or they often mass up at the base of the trees to pupate. If you find that your Siberian elms have lacy looking leaves this is probably the culprit but as late as we are getting into the season I can't justify spraying at this point. Most trees are big enough that it would be expensive and difficult. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cicada Killers and Hornets

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 we start to see a noticeable increase in two of our hymenoptera species (which are bees and wasps) and namely, the Cicada Killer and the Yellow Jacket. Cicada Killers are quite big and quite frightening. They are solitary nesters and do feed on cicadas. As with all bees and wasps, only the females can sting but unless you pick one up, they aren't going to sting. The males will hover around where females may be nesting hoping to mate with an unmated female. They will act aggressive and threatening, but they are all bluff. Yellow Jackets are a ground nesting wasp that looks a little like a streamlined supercharged honeybee. These are the ones that hang around picnics in the late summer trying to get to your food or in your drink. These are colony nesters that start over each spring with one queen doing all the work. As the summer goes along the colony gets bigger and bigger and the female workers take on specialized roles including guards. You can walk right by a Yellow Jacket nest all summer without being bothered when all of a sudden one day, they come out after you because the colony is big enough, they now have guards. While they are ultimately beneficial, they can swarm and sting aggressively. If a nest is discovered in your yard, it may be wise to get rid of it. Carefully locate the entry hole to the nest, which is in the ground or sometimes an old stump. When evening comes use a foaming hornet spray, then retreat in a few days. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.