

Preparing for lawn reseeding

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If we are going to reseed a lawn to get a fresh start or overseed to thicken up a lawn, then normally THE best time to do this is early September. Lawns have been heavily stressed this year and I don't know if September this year will be a good time to do any seeding. If you do some seeding, be prepared to water in case natural rainfall doesn't occur. You do not want to go out and just toss seed around. That just doesn't give you much success. You need to either till up the area to be seeded, apply the seed and rake it in or use a power seeder which you can rent from the hardware store. A power seeder is really my preferred method for overseeding as it allows you to plant into existing grass without having to tear it up. But before you put seed in the ground you need to take a soil test to see if lime, or sulfur needs to be added to adjust soil pH and also to see if we have enough phosphorus. Low soil pH and low phosphorus levels are the two most common issues when grass doesn't get well established. Don't buy a kit at the hardware store but go out to several places in your yard and collect a butter tub full of soil from the top three to four inches of lawn. Bring that tub of soil in to the Extension Office at 119 East 9th Street. We send it off to K-State for analysis, the results come back to me and I'll write up my recommendation of how much and what, if in fact you need to do anything. Then when early September gets here you can get that seed planted in your yard! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Snakes in the yard

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Snakes are not on the list of things that most people want to pick up and cuddle, let alone simply encounter in their yards. Part of the problem is that we do have a couple of venomous species of snakes in our part of Kansas. While neither one is common, they can be encountered and if you have children, small children, the possibility of their presence is concerning. I prefer to let all snakes live as they are a very important part of the web of life. Learning to identify snakes is very crucial to this whole process but I can't do that on the radio. Anyway, people have a desire to exclude snakes from their property but then do everything wrong in landscaping and invite the very snakes that they don't want, to come on to their property. Snakes like two things - warmth and cover. Low growing ground cover and shrubs provide a lot of shelter and the more rocks and concrete you have, the more attractive it will be. Snakes move into rocks and concrete areas at night as these areas retain heat longer than vegetation. People ask about the snake away or other compounds that will keep snakes out or repel snakes. In short, don't waste your money. While some products cause snakes to be reluctant to cross, keep in mind that they can also keep snakes IN your yard as well as keeping them OUT. Bottom line, habitat modification, and the simple knowledge that snakes will be in your yard periodically and then how do you tell a venomous from a non-venomous. If you have questions, call me. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Plant hitchhikers

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We have no less than about a dozen fairly common plants that are well adapted at attaching their seeds to your clothes or animal fur so that they will be distributed to places near and far. Some, especially some of the grass species, have a seed with a sharp point that will stick in your socks, especially and won't come out easily. That nasty little barley seed looks like a miniature badminton birdie and can cause great discomfort or injury in pet's feet. There's a few broadleaf plants that also use spines for attachment to hitch a ride. The plant called Spanish needles doesn't look like much and has a pretty little yellow flower, but get the seeds in your pantleg or socks and ouch! Puncturevine uses a very stout seed case with an even stouter thorn to hook to your shoes or tires to gain mobility or in some cases flatten your tires. Even more common than spines are hooks. Burdock and cockleburs have big seed capsules and big hooks to latch on and stay attached. Other plants use much smaller and non-painful hooks to grab and attach to clothing or fur. Hedge parsley, catchweed bedstraw, beggarticks, tick clover and then there's good old sandburs. If these annoy you and you are tired of picking them out of your shoelaces, then you need to learn to associate the plant with the seed and then remove the plants from your yard before they make seed. It's probably too late in the season to do that so start with bringing me the seeds so I can identify them and we can go from there! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cutting back peonies

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Peonies started looking sad in early July this year unless you were watering them heavily. Even though they may have looked somewhat wilted they were still trying to store up food reserves and well established peony plants are pretty darn resilient and tough. Which is why they are so well suited for Kansas. Under normal years, by mid August, the peonies have stored up enough carbohydrate reserves in the root systems that you can safely cut off the tops without harming next year's blooms. If your peonies have been looking sad and are continuing to look sad I'd say it's okay to go ahead and cut them down. If recent rains or irrigation have perked them up a bit, you may want to just leave them alone until early September to give them chance to get a little more food into the root system. One of my gripes about how homeowners handle peonies comes down to how they remove the old growth at the end of the season. Let me just say that the lawnmower is not a good method. Easy, but not good. We have a leaf disease that can be quite unsightly called peony measles. This disease overwinters on old foliage on the ground that was infected the previous year. Removing the old growth with a lawnmower shreds all the leaves and scatters those disease laden leaves everywhere so it's there ready to re-infect next year's leaves. Get your hand pruners and a trash can out. Go in and cut the old growth off at ground level, place the foliage in the trash can and get it burned or hauled away. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Better Lawns Start with Better Grass Seed

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 going to be seeding or overseeding your lawn this fall, the biggest mistake you'll probably make is in selecting your seed. You'll pick out the wrong type of grass for any number of reasons. Or you'll buy a less expensive grass seed that is cheaper because it contains seed that you don't want. For 98% of all situations you want to plant improved tall fescue or possibly Kentucky bluegrass. Avoid mixes that are labeled shady spot, hot spot, heavy traffic, anything that describes location or action. These are usually blends that have 90% grass species that aren't going to survive well. Avoid any fescue other than tall fescue. Avoid ryegrass. Avoid anything that has species labeled as "annual" which will usually be annual ryegrass or annual bluegrass. Look for tall fescue or bluegrass blends with several cultivars of those in them. Read the little tag that has to be on every container or bag of grass seed. They all will have 0% noxious weed seed - that's the law. Most won't have any weed seed at all. The one you want to look out for is the one that is called "other crop seed". Other crop seed refers to other grass varieties that may be sold for other purposes. And for all practical purposes assume that this means orchardgrass. Orchardgrass is a coarse pasture grass that is sometimes used for cattle feed. You want to look for grass blends that have 0% other crop seed. Orchardgrass in your lawn will cause you to curse for years to come! Just don't let it get started! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.