

Gardening with Chuck for February 26 - March 4, 2018

Asparagus

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In all reality, if you wanted to plant asparagus this spring, you needed to start getting the area ready last fall. But I'm no different than anyone else so let's just start working our way through the process. Asparagus is a perennial vegetable that you start by planting one year old crowns. You won't get to harvest anything until next year so pick a sunny corner of your garden that you will leave undisturbed. Crowns are planted from mid March to mid April - just whenever the soil warms up. As soon as the soil has thawed and isn't too wet to work, till up the area and incorporate some good compost or rotted manure, just any good organic matter source. Also incorporate 4 to 5 lbs of 5-10-5 fertilizer per 1,000 square feet while you're doing that tilling. To plant the crowns you'll dig a trench as wide as your garden spade and about 8 inches deep. If you want more than one row, space the trenches about four feet apart. Place the crowns in the bottom of the trench but only cover them with about 3 inches of soil. As the plants grow through the year you are going to slowly add soil so that by the end of the season the trench is fully filled in. Be sure to keep weeds under control and the plants well watered to ensure good establishment. Mulching will help. There are several very good newer cultivars that are far superior to the old Martha or Mary Washington clones. Look for Jersey Giant, Jersey King, Jersey Knight, Jersey Supreme, notice a theme here, or Purple Passion.

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Walnut Toxicity

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In the plant world there is a condition known where one plant will release chemicals into the soil that are toxic to other plants causing death of the other plants or at least, stunted growth. This is known as allelopathy. Walnuts and to a much lesser extent butternut and other hickories, release a chemical called juglone into the soil. As most gardeners have trouble saying juglone or allelopathy, we just refer to this as walnut toxicity. Some plants are quite tolerant of juglone while others are very sensitive. Topping the list of sensitive plants is everyone's favorite garden plant, tomatoes! Other vegetable crops sensitive to juglone include asparagus, cabbage, eggplant, peppers, potatoes and many fruit trees and shrubs. As long as a walnut tree is growing, it will release juglone into the soil. Wood chips, leave and walnut hulls that haven't composted for at least a year will release juglone. After a tree is cut down, dead roots will release the chemical into the soil for at least a year. Anywhere under the canopy or as far out as the roots spread are going to be impacted by juglone. Roots of a mature tree can easily go 50 to 75 feet beyond the tips of the outermost branches. Young walnut trees don't seem to produce juglone until they are over 7 years of age. Bottom line is that if you want to garden and there is a black walnut tree near, you may not have a lot of success. You can't neutralize it in the soil, you can just cut down the tree or find a new location for your garden! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What does a soil test tell you or not tell you?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Home owners routinely bring in soil from their yard or garden for testing to see what they need to add to their soil for better plant growth. The routine tests that we have the soils lab at K-State run include the major nutrients and many of the micro-nutrients, on special order. So we are looking at soil pH which is the measure of acidity or alkalinity. We test for nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and percent organic matter. We can also test for calcium, magnesium, manganese, sodium, iron, copper, zinc, chloride and sulfur. We can test for soluble salts and salt alkali. These are all principle components in healthy plant growth. While several of these nutrients are rarely deficient in Kansas conditions, we can still test for them fairly easily. We can also test for soil texture which is basically breaking the soil down into the three main components, sand silt and clay. The ratio of these tells us whether it's a silty clay loam, a loamy sand, a clay, or any of about 12 different soil types. The ratio of these indicate how water and plant growth will behave in your soil. We can even have the soil around older homes tested for lead that may have leached out of old lead based paint. What we don't routinely test for are pesticides in the soil. There are tests for these but you need a commercial lab and then you have to tell them exactly what you want it tested for. And each test is a separate fee. If a homeowner wants these, I can direct you to the labs that will do it. For nutrient testing, we can do that! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fertilizing spring flowering bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I think we can all remember years when we have had crocus blooming by the end of February. But not this year! As much as I've been griping about being cold, it's actually a nice change to be at the end of February and the apricot trees haven't started blooming yet. But before long the weather will be warming up and we will start to see those first early spring blooms and boy will they be a sight for sore eyes this year!

Traditionally, many gardeners have fertilized their spring flowering bulbs as they were blooming. What we've found over the years though is that once they start flowering the plants are far more interested in just moving food from the leaves to the bulbs. To really do some good, fertilizer needs to be applied just as the new foliage comes up out of the ground or even a little bit before that time. Keep in mind that with those spring flowering bulbs, what you're doing this year is going to impact next year's blossoms - you're always working a year ahead so to speak.

Bulb plantings that have been having fewer and smaller blossoms may need to be dug and reset or they may be short on fertilizer. Since most of the time you aren't soil testing the individual areas where the bulbs are growing, using a balanced fertilizer is probably the best approach. One rounded tablespoon of a 10-10-10 type of fertilizer per square foot is adequate for spring flowering bulbs. Then remember to let the foliage die down on it's own before you cut it back!

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What Doesn't A Soil Test Tell You

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We talked about what soil tests will tell you a couple of days ago, so what happens when a homeowner brings in a soil sample and the test says everything is just fine, but the homeowner isn't happy with the way their garden or lawn is growing. That's when it becomes time for an onsite visit and some discussion. There are many factors that the homeowner may be overlooking, that I notice the minute I set foot on the property. Here are some of the more common ones. First of all, not enough sun. Turfgrass and most vegetables need full sun which means direct sun for a minimum of 8 hours per day. New grass seeding that start out good in the fall but as the next year progresses just slowly thins out, classic insufficient sunshine. As if the shading effect by the leaves isn't enough of an issue, we can also have competition with tree roots and mature trees usually win in those situations. We also run into soils with poor physical characteristics. Typically this amounts to soils with a lot of clay that have been compacted and/or are regularly wet. Either of these results in low soil oxygen levels with causes issues with root growth and plant development. Shallow soils, especially in the more upland settings can be a real issue. Other issues that we run into can include excessive phosphorus levels in the soil, what are usually called by an overzealous homeowner. Then we have over watering or just plain improper watering. Soil tests help, but won't tell you everything! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.