

March Lawn Care

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 have a fescue or bluegrass lawn and have been out in your yard lately, you've probably noticed that there are green sprigs starting to show up. Spring is slowly crawling back towards our region, although a little rain would really help. The next few weeks are the chance to make up for any missed opportunities last fall. Did you fertilize last fall and treat for broadleaf weeds after October 1st? If not, apply a weed and feed in the next week or so. However, you may also want to consider a three way product with a crabgrass preventer, weed killer and a fertilizer. The newer crabgrass preventer products, namely Barricade and Dimension have very long residual control so you can apply them anytime in March and expect season long control of summer annual grasses like crabgrass. Naturally read all the label directions as many of these have specific instructions about applying when the grass leaves are wet or watering the product in, as with crabgrass preventers, to activate the herbicide. In fact with these newer products it can take several weeks, following a half inch of rain or so, for them to really get fully active. A couple of things to keep in mind though. If you want to dethatch or core aerate, do both of these prior to applying your crabgrass preventer or you will negate the effectiveness of the herbicide. Additionally, if you are needing to do some reseeding or overseeding, do not apply herbicides of any kind now as they can damage the new grass seedlings. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Spring Lawn Seeding

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The lawn season is upon us! Which is a good thing as it gives me lots more to talk about! We are in that awkward time when dormant season seeding of lawns is wrapping up and what I like to call normal seeding starts. Basically, because of the weather conditions that we've been having, dry and cold, I'm suggesting that folks just get ready to go forward with regular seeding. Several things to keep in mind. The grass seed really needs to be placed in the ground. Sowing grass seed on the soil surface just generally doesn't work. The power seeders that are available for rent work really well. I've used them on several occasions and never been disappointed. Secondly, if you are doing any seeding avoid weed killers and certainly most crabgrass preventers. Most of these herbicides don't know the difference between crabgrass, fescue or bluegrass. We have options to deal with the crabgrass later. Make sure you are using a good tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass blend. Avoid blends that have ryegrass or creeping red fescue. These may come up fast and look good at first, but they generally don't survive our summers. Read the seed bag label closely and avoid anything that has any "other crop seed". This generally is referring to orchard grass and even a small percentage of it in your seed mix will haunt you for years to come. Pay the extra money for a good fescue blend. Get it planted IN the soil, and then start watering if it doesn't rain to get it established. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Planting a Wildflower Bed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. More and more people want to get into the wildflower craze for a whole host of reasons. The reason that makes the most sense is because it can look cool to have a little slice of prairie in your yard. Some think it will be less work because they'll have less grass to mow. Others want to plant it to attract more pollinators. But wildflowers are far more work to get established than many folks realize. First of all, some are annuals and some are perennials. If it is all flowers you may be disappointed and I would suggest you use a mix that has some native grasses in with it. These plants do not take root and do well in areas with existing vegetation. You really need to start with bare soil. Which means you often want to start by treating with glyphosate in the fall, then tilling so you are ready to go in mid spring. The seed mixes can also be expensive. This isn't like planting zinnias. You want a good seed bed that is not clumpy or cloddy but firm. You want to rake the seed into the soil so that it is about 1/4 inch deep. We generally don't recommend mulching, but you do need to water 3 to 4 times per week until you start to get good germination and then slowly start to back off the watering as the plants develop. Many of these are warm season plants and really need soil temperatures above 60 degrees so ideal seeding dates are going to be after April 1st up through about May 15th. A soil thermometer is often better at telling you when to plant than a calendar! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Warm Season Grass Care

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We spend a lot of time talking about cool season turf care because over 85% of homes have a cool season grass, namely fescue or bluegrass. BUT there are a few folks with Bermudagrass lawns or Zoysia or even buffalograss. These are all warm season grasses and have very different needs than a cool season lawn. Warm season lawns don't start growing until the weather warms up in late April or early May. Bermuda and zoysia are fairly aggressive lawn grasses that once established are very resilient. Buffalograss, while highly touted for being low maintenance, is also probably better suited to areas further west than us. Buffalograss should not be heavily fertilized as it's somewhat open turf nature makes it susceptible to weed invasion if heavily fertilized or in wet years. On the other hand, Bermuda and zoysia really thrive under heavy fertilization. But don't fertilize in the fall or too early in the spring because it will just encourage the things you don't want growing there. For the next month or so you want to spot treat any broadleaf weeds in your warm season grasses. By the time that the redbuds start blooming you want to have your crabgrass preventer applied. I generally encourage homeowners with warm season grasses to hit them with 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet the first of May, June, July and August. These applications will make the grass greener and thicker but also make you mow more. An alternative is to fertilize in just May and June. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Blueberries

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Every year people call me up asking about how they can grow blueberries. So the first thing I ask them is if they are absolutely sure that they want to grow blueberries. If they respond yes, I say great, move to Michigan! And I'm not trying to be funny, I'm just trying to make the point that our soils and our climate are not really blueberry friendly. Blueberries need acid soil and by acid I mean down around a pH of 4.8 to 5.2. Many of our yards have a soil pH that is alkaline, a pH of 7 to 8. So you are first going to need a lot of soil amendments. Blueberries also do not have root hairs. Root hairs are the tiny little fibrous filaments growing off of roots. Root hairs are very efficient at gathering up water resources. Since blueberries don't have these, it becomes very important to mulch heavily and water regularly. You can't drown them like cranberries, but you can't let them dry out either. They will also need to be protected from the hot dry southwest winds of summer. They really do not like that. If you want to grow blueberries, you are asking for a ton of work and expense. Kansas is not a blueberry friendly region and you may be better off saving your money and just buying them at the store. If you still want to try to grow blueberries, and you don't really want to move to Michigan, then come by and visit with me. There are extensive and specific instructions for you to follow that I will be happy to provide to you, and buying blueberries is looking better! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.