

### Potato planting time

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. St. Patrick's Day is over and you didn't get your potatoes planted?! (Gasp!) Well, don't worry. People get in a hurry to plant potatoes and sorry to say, St. Patrick's Day planting has little to do with success of planting. I've seen a lot of St Paddy's Day potatoes take a long time to come out of the ground and end up not doing well. While potatoes can be planted in early March, I'm a firm believe that mid to late March will serve you better, just be sure to have them in the ground before April. The other thing to keep in mind about potatoes is that they can also be planted in late June through late July for a fall harvest and often do just as well or better than a spring planting. If you buy whole seed potatoes cut them up several days before planting so the cut surfaces have a chance to seal over or suberize before planting to protect them from soil decay organisms. Keeping the freshly cut seed potatoes at room temperature will speed the process. Make sure each piece of seed potato has at least one eye on it. One pound of seed potatoes should provide 8 to 10 seed pieces. Plant the pieces 1 to 2 inches deep, 8 to 12 inches apart in rows 3 feet apart. As the plants grow you will need to pull dirt up over the row, a process called hilling, to provide growing space for the plants to produce potatoes as the plant will only produce new spuds ABOVE the seed potato piece. Fertilize with a good starter fertilizer before, at or shortly after planting, and water if the soil is dry! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Rhubarb planting time

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. To me, nothing says spring quite like rhubarb, as it is one of the first fresh vegetables of spring. Interestingly, rhubarb doesn't really have much nutritional value. It's essentially a leaf stalk with few redeeming qualities and I love it! Rhubarb can be a bit tricky to grow, but once established it's hardy. It really needs good drainage both water moving away from it and well drained soil so it doesn't get waterlogged and develop root rot. With all of our heavy clay soils it is often a good idea to plant it on a bit of a berm and mix a generous portion of well rotted barnyard manure into the soil under where you are planting it. Figure one to two pounds of manure per square foot of bed. Rhubarb also prefers acid soil - the manure will help with that but you may need to add some sulfur to help get it down to or below 7. Rhubarb plants get big so plants need to be 2 to 3 feet apart within a row and rows 4 to 5 feet apart. Or, planting them on about a 3 foot grid works pretty well also. My preference is to do it that way so that the leaves pretty well shade out all the ground and you don't have many problems with weeds once it is well established. Crowns are planted shallow - basically just one half to one inch deep. Firm the soil around the crowns but make sure there isn't a depression that will hold water. There are several newer varieties - newer being a relative term here - but recommended varieties include Canada Red, Crimson Red, McDonald and Valentine. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Why I don't like spring seeding of grasses

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay, last week I talked about spring seeding of grasses because there are times when you simply have to plant grass seed in the spring. But if you have an option, wait until fall and here's why. Fescue and bluegrass are cool season grasses. They prefer growing in the cooler times of the year. Fescue planted the end of August or the first of September can be out of the ground in 4 days. Fescue seeded in late March or early April may take one to two weeks to germinate. In the fall, we don't have to worry about crabgrass providing competition. The grass often has several months to grow and develop before going into winter dormancy and then all spring to get a good crown and root system developed to withstand its first summer heat. Grass seed planted now only has until June to get that same root system developed to withstand the rigors of our Kansas summer. It just usually works better to seed at the end of summer. BUT, sometimes you just have to seed your lawns now. Probably that last week of March and first week of April is the ideal time. If we don't get some rain, start watering to get it up and growing. We simply don't have the time to be patient and wait for rain. We do have a newer crabgrass control product, Dimension, that can be applied about two weeks AFTER the new fescue or bluegrass is up and growing - not the first sprigs, but two weeks after the majority of it is up. Most years, with an early spring planting, this will still be in time to stop much of the crabgrass. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Time to cut back ornamental grasses

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I see more and more ornamental grasses in landscapes every year. Grasses do well in full sun, they provide color, texture and height in the landscape. They also tend to be pretty drought resistant and most of them are long or moderately long lived perennials. However, they do have a down side. Once they dry down in the fall, they become a fire risk, plain and simple. If they are away from any building that isn't a problem, BUT you still need to get that old dead foliage out of there come late winter or early spring. It simply isn't very attractive to have 6 feet of dead grass with new grass coming up in the middle of it. If you live in town you have no choice but to cut it down. If it's a smaller species of grass this isn't much of a problem. You cut it off an inch or two above the ground you gather it up and throw it in the trash. It often can help if you use twine and tie it tightly together before cutting so you aren't chasing little pieces of grass all over the yard afterwards. If you've got some of the bigger stuff, especially a well established clump of good old pampas grass, you've got a mess. You still want to try to tie it up and then use a chain saw or weed eater or even an electric hedge trimmer to cut it off. Be warned that when dry, this stuff is scratchy and irritating. Wear long sleeves. Now, if you live out in the country, my preferred way of dealing with this stuff, is fire. Make sure you have a burn permit if you are in Geary County and call for permission to burn first. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Spring Cleanup Now to Prevent Perennial Flower Diseases later

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We've all heard the old saying that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. When it comes to disease on a couple of our most popular perennial flowers, it's very true. Peonies and Bearded Irises, sometimes called flags, are both afflicted with foliar diseases which, while not fatal, can certainly impact the health and floriferousness of the plants over the long haul. With peonies it's a leaf spot disease we generally call peony measles because of the red leaf spots. With irises it's called iris leaf spot. In both cases the disease overwinters on the old dead leaves. Removal of the peony foliage in the fall, NOT mowing it off, is very helpful, but you have to get the old foliage moved out of the area and preferably burning or put in the trash and hauled off. If you didn't clean off your peonies last fall, do it soon! With the irises you need to get out there now and clean off all the old dead leaves. Carefully remove all that old dead foliage and get it out of the area, again preferably burning it or at least getting it well out of the area or put it in the trash. If you haven't seen much of the disease, that may be all you have to do. But if you've had a lot of leaf spot issues in past years you will need to start spraying with a fungicide, either chlorothalonil or myclobutanil, with a spreader sticker. Start treating as soon as the new leaves start growing and spray every 7 to 10 days for 4 to 6 sprays. If it's dry every 10 days, if it's rainy OR you are watering regularly, every 7 days. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.