

### Perennial Bed Cleanup - Don't Go Crazy

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Gardeners, well, many gardeners, are well known for being rather zealous at cleaning up the yard and garden in the fall. In some cases I fully support and encourage this. When possible, getting the vegetable garden cleaned off and tilled (well, except for where the garlic is of course), is a good way to get a jump on spring gardening and good for managing insect and disease issues. Ornamental grasses near buildings should likewise be cut off and removed to reduce fire risk. But some gardeners just go overboard. Peonies and iris should probably be cleaned up in the fall to help reduce disease risk. I cleaned off my peonies over the weekend. But many perennials can be left through the winter with no ill effect, in fact, there may be many benefits. Many of those herbaceous perennials provide shelter and even food for birds and small mammals. Mums are a classic case of leaving the old growth in place helps protect the plant. The standing stems of many perennials will catch leaves for instant mulch and even help trap snow that will slowly soak in and keep the soil profile filled. Many of these plants have seeds that the birds will find and feed on. Rabbits and other native small mammals can find refuge in and around these plants. So instead of working yourself silly this fall doing all the cleanup, just let it go. These will be good tasks for you to do next spring when the first warm days come and you just HAVE to get out side and do something. Spring will be soon enough. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Draining Hoses and Irrigation Lines

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It's going to get cold one of these days. Oh sure, we've had some frosty weather, but not down to the mid or lower 20s kind of hard freeze. When that time comes you want to have drained your sprinkler system, if you have one, and disconnected your hoses from hydrants. You don't really need to water your lawn anymore this fall. Trust me, at this time the soil is wet enough! Most homeowners have a service that takes care of winterizing their irrigation system. If you don't, take the steps to get the lines drained soon so you don't end up with unexpected little geysers around the lawn next spring. Even good quality garden hoses can be strained and their lives shortened by not getting them drained. Frost proof hydrants only work, as in don't freeze up and crack, if the hose is removed from the spigot so that the water can drain out. If you think you may need to still use a hose to clean out gutters or something, you can always store it in the garage until you need it. While you can drain hoses and leave them outside for the winter, again, their lives will be shortened as UV light starts to break down the hose material. Lay the hose out flat and then slowly start pulling the hose back towards you and coiling it. As you do this the water will run out the end of the hose that is slowly coming towards you. Take your time doing this to allow the water time to drain down. Then store the hoses in a garage or shop or at least out of direct sunlight. Also check the washers and replace if worn. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Leaves, Part 2

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 how you don't HAVE to necessarily rake up leaves. I'm sure that there's more than one lawn-aholic that was scoffing at that thinking that you are eventually going to just smother that poor grass out if you don't.

Researchers at Michigan State University wondered the same thing so they did a five year study where they would use a mulching mower to shred one pound of leaves per square yard. One pound per square yard amounts to about 6 inches of uncompressed leaves. The researchers did this for five consecutive years making all sorts of measurements during the course of each year checking on thatch thickness, organic content of the thatch, soil test results looking at pH and nutrients as well as overall visual quality of the lawn. They found no negative effects through the course of the five year study. With that said, regular mowing should be done. My ash leaves fell all at once this year, with no wind, so I started mowing the leaves down this past weekend and will continue to do it regularly for a couple more weeks. It will help to apply a nitrogen fertilizer after you do this as nitrogen feeds the microbes that break down the leaves. Core aerating every couple of years likely helps to keep mixing those nutrients and organic matter down into the soil. A mulching mower works best for this procedure but a side discharge mower can work too, it just doesn't shred the leaves as thoroughly. It also works for warm season lawns.

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## Branches Dropping From Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We all know that in the fall of the year, leaves turn color and drop off of the trees. This happens because the tree develops an abscission layer where the leaf attaches to the tree cutting off the flow of nutrients. Perhaps shockingly, trees will sometimes also do this with small branches. I've seen it happen on cottonwoods, but it's also been reported this fall with sawtooth oak and searching the literature on this we see that it can happen with almost any tree species. Unlike squirrels nipping off branch tips, which have a slick angled cut, branches that are dropped will have an end that looks like the ball end of a ball and socket joint. It's very neatly and well developed abscission layer. This is an uncommon condition known as cladoptosis and no, I'm not making that word up, you can look it up! Some trees do this very regularly, essentially self pruning to clean things up, but it can also be caused by stress, such as drought or rapid fluctuation between wet and dry. Shading and injury can also trigger this branch drop. I actually run it across it at various times of the year with cottonwoods. While it doesn't necessarily mean that the tree is currently stressed, it is a good reminder that in dry weather, anytime of the year, watering trees is a good idea. Right now trees aren't experiencing drought stress, if anything, some may be a little too wet. But last year would have been a good example of a time to water trees in the fall. Branches that have fallen just need to be cleaned up. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Roasting Pumpkin Seeds

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There are many homeowners, based on what I see on my way from home to work, that use a lot of pumpkins for decorations. I'm not just talking jack-o-lanterns here, I'm talking whole, intact pumpkins. It won't be too much longer, probably, before we will have some cold enough weather that those will freeze solid and then start to slowly break down. You can let them go through that process and wind up with something you have to scoop up with a shovel to put in the trash or the compost pile, OR you can put them to good use as food. Obviously you can take the meat in the shell and cook it down to make pumpkin pie. Check with a cookbook on how to do that. But what about those seeds? Ya know, roasted pumpkin seeds are a very popular snack for many people. Cut open the pumpkin and remove the seeds and stringy material. Wash the seeds as best you can and then spread them out to dry so you can remove those stringy filaments. Next, put those seeds, free of the strings, in a bowl and toss with a little cooking oil. Add a little bit of salt and stir or toss them around to get the oil and salt well distributed. Spread these seeds on a cookie sheet or jelly roll pan and roast at 325 degrees F for about 25 minutes. Times are going to vary based on the size of the seed and moisture content of the seed. They are done when they turn a golden brown. If not eaten immediately, store in a resealable plastic bag. And I'll bet you can do this with squash seeds too!

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