

Too Late To Plant Grass?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay, it's the middle of October. My rule of thumb is to stop fall grass seed planting by October 15th. As I said last week, we need to stop planting bluegrass October 1st. We're way past that. I'm not budging on that. Tall fescue can be planted later. Perennial ryegrass could be planted later also. It emerges very quickly. If you HAVE to plant something, that may be what I'd recommend. But recognize it's only a stop gap measure until you can get bluegrass or fescue planted. The reason being is that perennial ryegrass does not do well in our hot dry summers. It tends to be somewhat short lived. Tall fescue is still my preferred turf grass species. If we know that it's going to stay fairly warm up to Thanksgiving then I wouldn't have a problem with planting later. But we don't know. If you plant tall fescue later than now, it may do fine. It may not come up until next spring. But you can do what you want to. There's aren't turfgrass cops that are going to come and give you a ticket for planting too late in the fall. But in reality if you want to still get some grass seed planted this fall, and you don't care if it doesn't come up until next spring, then just do what's called dormant season planting. Wait until mid November. The ground will be cooler and the seed will essentially sit in the soil and wait for warm weather to arrive. You need to use a power seeder to get the seed down into the ground, and maybe plant a little thicker, but it will work with all grass species. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fall Pruning of Trees and Shrubs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When it comes to fall and some homeowners start doing some yard clean up one thing can lead to another and then they get carried away and problems develop. We don't really want to do too much pruning of any woody ornamental in August or early September because that can stimulate new growth that will be prone to winter damage. But now homeowners may be thinking, it's too late in the fall for that to happen and they just go pruning happy. There is some newer research that basically says woody plants that are pruned in the fall fail to attain maximum cold hardiness EVEN if there isn't new growth. One thing that I remember an old forester say to me was that any pruning cut on a woody plant in the fall was not going to do any healing until the following spring. A pruning cut in the spring will start healing immediately. I think there was a long standing belief that pruning cuts made in the fall don't bleed sap so there's no problem. Pruning cuts in the spring often sap extensively, but while it may look bad it doesn't really hurt the plant. So I would avoid much pruning at all in the fall. All of that aside we need to remember that any shrub that blooms first thing in the spring, has already formed those flower buds. They were in place 6 to 8 weeks ago. You prune a lilac or spirea or forsythia right now, you're cutting off flower buds that will never have the chance to bloom. Bottom line, I know that you want to clean up the yard, but please don't do any pruning now! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fall Soil Testing

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Lawns, vegetable gardens and flower gardens all need to be fertilized regularly. I'm not sure that we need to soil test these areas every year, but I think every second or third year would be a good plan. We need to know what the soil pH is. Soil pH is a real challenge around here because we can go from fairly acid soils to fairly alkaline soils in just a very short distance. Past gardening practices and especially fertilization can really change soil pH. Lots and lots of fertilizer will move soil pH towards more acidic. Adding fireplace ashes, which we don't recommend, will raise soil pH - something many of our soils don't need as they are already fairly alkaline. I routinely have garden soil samples brought in that have phosphorus levels that are through the roof. People have been adding fertilizer for 20 years, every year without ever knowing if they really needed it. It is possible to get phosphorus levels so high that it starts interfering with the plant's ability to take up other nutrients. On the other hand, if phosphorus levels are quite low and you aren't fertilizing, you will have very poor production in fact very poor plant growth. We see this regularly in lawns that were once native pastures. It's easy to have your soil tested. Go out to 6 or 8 spots in your garden or lawn. Use a trowel and get a trowel full of soil down about 6 inches. Put these trowels of soil into a bucket, mix it up well and pull out a one pint sample, a butter tub, and bring into the office but not in a sealed bag. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Black Walnut Processing

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Black Walnuts are likely an acquired taste. If you grew up with black walnuts you probably love them. And I think you have to love them to go through the effort to get the meat out of the nut. Black walnuts are falling off the trees now which means it's time for them to be harvested and processed. To start with, you have to get the husk off the nut. When you husk the nuts be very careful and wear gloves. The husks will stain absolutely everything that they touch. If you don't get them off, they will leach a stain THROUGH the nut and into the meat. Not only will it discolor them, it will give them an off flavor. Some people run them through an old fashioned hand cranked corn sheller, others pound them through a hole in the board that's just slightly bigger than the nut inside the husk. Or you can lay them on the grass - don't do it on a concrete driveway or sidewalk, and run over them with the tires of a garden tractor. This will bust the husk off without breaking the nut. Next wash the hulled nuts. You can spread them on the lawn or a wire mesh and turn the hose on them. You can also do it in a tub of water which is a good way to get rid of the nuts that aren't any good as they'll float. After all of this spread the nuts out in layers no more than three deep in a cool shady and dry place such as a garage or tool shed. It should take two to three weeks for the nuts to dry. Then the task of breaking the nuts and getting the meat out which requires heavy duty nut crackers! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Working Gardens in the Fall

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I was just getting ready to till my garlic spot a second time ahead of planting, when all that rain showed up. Now I don't know IF I will get it worked again - I just may have to get it as dry as I can, make my rows and get my garlic planted. Fall tillage of gardens is a good idea. Tilling the soil is very important for gardening. The no-till practices used in production agriculture aren't really meant for vegetable gardens. We need to get that soil worked up so that it isn't quite so hard. Many of our garden crops grow underground and we need that soil as mellow as possible. Tilling in the fall allows us to work organic matter into the soil. Organic matter is the best answer to improving sandy soils and heavy clay soils. Get that organic matter tilled in during the fall and it has all winter to start to break down and mellow out. Tilling in the fall helps bury residue that may be carrying diseases from one growing season to another. Many insect pests, like grasshoppers, lay their eggs in the soil. So fall tillage breaks open those egg cases greatly reducing the survival of those eggs for the next year. But even with all those benefits, we have to be careful not to work wet soil. When wet soil is tilled it creates clods. Clods that will haunt you all the next year. If we get some good drying weather and it doesn't stay too cold, after a couple of weeks you can probably get that soil worked down. But if it doesn't get dried out, we're just going to have to wait until next spring and delay our spring planting. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.