

Digging Sweet Potatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A taste of winter and some pretty nippy temperatures snuck up on us in a hurry early last week. The soils got wet and the soils got cold. If you hadn't dug your sweet potatoes before now, you need to get to work on that now and the sooner the better. Cold soils and frost really shock those roots and while they're still safe to eat, their storage life has already been shortened. Let's review some of the key things to remember. Sweet potatoes, are a tropical vine. Cool weather hurts the vines, cool weather hurts the roots. Sweet potatoes are a swollen root, not a tuber like Irish potatoes. Sweet potatoes are best harvested just before the first fall freeze. That first freeze kind of snuck up on us! If you let the vines freeze hard and the soil cool off very much, you can hurt the roots so they lose quality and don't store nearly as long. But if you haven't harvested your sweet potatoes yet, don't panic, they haven't lost that much quality yet. But don't dally, start digging as soon as the ground dries out a bit! Sweet potatoes should be cured after harvest. This helps to heal small wounds in the tender skin. Place the roots in a warm humid location for 5 to 10 days. 85 to 90 degrees is ideal. You can use a space heater to help warm things up and also place moist towels around the curing room to raise the humidity. This curing heals wounds and helps to convert starches to sugars for improved flavor. Once they are cured you want to store the sweet potatoes at room temperature. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Hardiness of cool season vegetables

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Not all vegetables are created the same. Yeah, I know, Brussels sprouts and kale are not broccoli and cauliflower but that's not what I'm talking about. Different garden crops have different tolerance to heat and cold. That's why we plant some things early and some things later. We had enough chill a week ago that things like tomatoes and peppers may be looking, well, pretty much done. But other vegetable crops may very well still be hanging in there. We sort of have three levels of cold hardiness in vegetable crops. The first level is no cold hardiness. Tomatoes, peppers, sweet potatoes would fall into this realm. A little frost and they are shutting down and gone. Next we have the semi hardy crops, these can take temperatures down into the upper 20s. The kind of temperatures most of us have seen. These are crops like beets, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, collards and Irish potatoes. These crops are the ones most likely to be helped by covering with a cloth, assuming there isn't a lot of wind. Then the hardy crops are going to be all the cole crops like cabbage and broccoli as well as carrots, turnips and kale. Many of these can even be protected with floating row covers and often prolong harvest into late November. One other really neat thing to consider is that many root crops can remain in the ground after the leaves are nipped by frost. Toss some mulch over beets, turnips, carrots and potatoes and you can continue harvest them until the ground freezes. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Winter Storage of Summer Bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We hit the end of the growing season with a thud this year. It wasn't really all that much earlier than normal, only about five days and well within the expected normal variation. What these first frosts of fall signal is time for us to dig and store those summer bulbs. Those plants that are inherently perennial but won't usually survive if we don't bring them in for the winter. This includes glads, caladiums, dahlia, tuberous begonia, calla lily and cannas. None of these are truly a bulb by the way. They may be rhizomes, tubers, corms or tuberous rooted plant. Dig them once the frost has browned the foliage. And this year you may have to wait a little longer or dig carefully because of wet soils. Get the plants dug and knock off what you can of the dirt or mud. Then allow them to dry for a week or two in a shady well ventilated location such as a garage or tool shed. Don't let these drying plants freeze as there may be damage done to them. Once the soil and plants have dried remove the rest of the dried or drying up foliage and carefully knock off the rest of the soil. Then pack the bulbs in peat moss, vermiculite or perlite. Don't allow the bulbs to touch each other. If one starts to rot and is in contact with another one, the decay will just spread. Dusting them with a fungicide can help reduce this risk. Caladiums need to be stored between 50 and 60 degrees in a dry location. The others can be stored at or near 40 degrees. A basement up against an outside wall often works well. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Control Broadleaf Weeds Now

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We're now in the last half of October. The ground has cooled enough that we won't have that many more broadleaf weeds coming up in our yard. The last round of rains likely sprouted any remaining weed seeds that were laying around that were prone to sprouting this fall so now we can get serious on our lawn weed control. I'm willing to bet that if you walk around your yard and you look down at any open spaces in your yard, you'll find all sorts of quaint little green seedlings coming up there that aren't grass. Before I go any further let me add that if you planted grass this fall, especially recently, and it isn't big enough that you've been able to mow it about 3 times, you may want to wait until spring to avoid damaging those young grass plants. There are a myriad of broadleaf weed killers on the market for you to use. The granular weed and feed products are easy and convenient. Read and follow label directions for maximum effectiveness. As we move out of October and into November in the coming days you may want to switch to a liquid herbicide. There's lots of easy to use products designed to just fasten to your garden hose, turn on the water and spray. In cooler weather these tend to be more effective. They are going to work best at temperatures above 50 degrees so the plants are actively growing so they will take up the herbicide. If it get's cooler switch to a product containing carfentrazone such as Weed Free Zone or SpeedZone. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Putting the lawnmower away for winter

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I have this mental cartoonish image of some gardeners riding their lawnmower into the storage shed bailing off before it even has completely stopped and walking away for the winter just like that. I hope you don't do that. I want you to put that lawnmower away cleaned and ready to roll come spring. Start by cleaning it all up. Get all that dust and grass clippings off the mower. Change the oil and drain the gas tank OR use a gasoline stabilizer. Put in a new spark plug but before you do that put a few drops of oil in the spark plug hole to help lubricate the cylinder. Clean up the battery terminals and remove the battery or hook it to a battery maintainer to keep it charged through the winter. Turn the mower over or remove the mower deck so you can remove the blades and then use a wire brush to get all that grass and debris removed from the mower deck. Use a wire brush or a wire brush wheel on a grinder to get all the dried up grass off the mower blades. Check the blades over for damage. If they are damaged, get new ones. If they are okay, then remove nicks from the cutting edge and use a grinding wheel or a file to sharpen the blade. It's sometimes very helpful to balance the blade - there are very simple devices that can help you determine if it is balance and a little extra grinding or filing can get them balanced up for smoother operation. Finally wipe down the blades with solvent or oil, put everything back together and now you're ready for storage and next spring! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.