

Gardening with Chuck for September 24 - 30, 2018

Trees Good For Fall Color

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Before long I will start getting people coming up to me in the grocery store, pulling out their phone to show me a photo of some tree with wonderful fall foliage, wanting to know what it is because they want one JUST LIKE IT. I understand the desire to have striking fall foliage color in trees, and no, I don't know what kind of foliage display we'll have this year. The weather's been all messed up so I have no idea what to expect. The other thing to keep in mind is that other than the shrub smooth sumac, and the vines poison ivy and Virginia creeper we just don't have a lot of woody plants with what most people would call good fall color. Cottonwoods, silver maples and green ash can all have some rather striking yellow foliage, but I can't with a clear conscience recommend planting any of those as yard trees due to a whole host of issues. Our native oaks basically have a fall color of brown. It's just the way that they are. Many people plant red maples for good fall color, but I rarely see a red maple that's doing well. Red maples are just not a good match for Kansas weather. You are better off to plant a Caddo maple like John Pair or Autumn splendor. These have good red fall color and good drought tolerance. Shantung maple also has pretty good fall color and is a slightly smaller tree. There's also scarlet oak, crimson oak and shumard oak. They may not be quite as brilliant as the maples but still good fall color. And that's assuming, good weather. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Planting Trees 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 like fall planting of trees. Instead of planting into cold, wet, low oxygen soils in March and April, you're planting into warm drier highly oxygenated soils. Even though trees appear to be going dormant right now, the roots are still actively growing. By planting now you'll get those root systems well settled in and working into the native soil before the root system goes dormant in another 6 to 8 weeks. A couple of things to keep in mind. If you are planting ball and burlap trees, remember to remove all that stuff that's around the root ball. Take off the wire cage, the burlap and certainly all the twine. That burlap does not rot away as fast as you may have believed that it does mainly because our soils tend to be dry and higher pH. If you have a containerized tree, make sure that there aren't circling roots and cut them if you do. Circling roots become girdling roots and they shorten the life of the tree. Make sure that the tree is set so the crown is right at ground level. Planting it deeper inhibits proper root development, especially those so crucial root flares. Settle the soil, water it down but don't drown it. Mulch with a doughnut of mulch, not a volcano. Staking for many trees is not necessary but if you do stake it, remove staking after one year. Use a paper tree wrap and wrap the trunk to protect against winter sunscald. While most trees can be fall planted, we discourage fall planting of fruit trees as well as redbuds, willow, scarlet and black oaks. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Soil Subsidence

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There's an old saying that a drought has a long tail. What that means is that after you have a severe drought, which we have just been through, you are going to see impacts and issues from this dry weather for months and years to come. One that has started showing up is what we call soil subsidence. Many of our soils have quite a bit of clay in them. Many of these clay soils have a large shrink swell potential. When they dry out, they shrink. Sometimes we can see massive gaps appear around our foundations as the soil shrinks and pulls away. Then when the soils start to get wet, they will swell back up. What can happen is that if there had been dirt work done in your yard sometimes several years before the drought event, you can have soil that didn't get well settled down. This could be backfilling around a foundation. It could be an old tree stump that was ground up. It could be underground utilities that were buried maybe as much as 7 or 8 years ago. As the ground shrinks it starts to settle as the pieces of soil move around and perhaps even more voids are created so when it does start to rain, soil can settle even more. Fortunately, we don't have the right geology here to have the sinkholes that occur in places like California and Florida. Any settling of soil and small holes that develop are going to be caused by previous soil work that was done and subsequent settling of that soil over time. This may put water in your basement, but it won't swallow your car! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Mosquitoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I think we all knew what was going to happen after those big rains on Labor Day. Yeah, big rains, standing water, warm temperatures is the perfect recipe for a mosquito population explosion. Speaking from personal experience, they are out there and they are vicious! People have varying responses to mosquitoes. Some simply become recluses in their homes. Many of us continue as normal but just slather up with repellents and know we'll still get a few bites. Others immediately want to start fogging or spraying their yards. The last approach, what I call the chemical warfare approach, is probably the least effective. The problem is that many mosquito species will fly over a quarter of a mile every day in search of meals. Additionally, many of our chemical treatments never get to where the mosquitoes are resting during the day. The first step is to make sure we aren't producing more mosquitoes. Empty and clean bird baths and pet watering bowls once a week. Make sure that if there are saucers under potted plants that they aren't holding water. This hold for plants inside your home as well. Make sure that gutters and down spouts are draining off all the water. If you have large water ponds use mosquito dunks. Late summer is the highest risk time for West Nile Virus and it has been detected this year. If outside use appropriate repellents to protect yourself. Many people aren't seriously affected by West Nile, but to a very few it can be fatal so be careful! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Planting Spring Flowering Bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Late September through early November is the time for planting spring flower bulbs, things like tulips, daffodils and many others. We've just come through a rather warm 3 weeks of September so normal soil cool down is just now getting started. But certainly take advantage of this time to get out and get your bulbs purchased.

They've been in the store for weeks now! OR, if you dug up some bulbs last spring to separate and re-set them, get started now trying to find them, and good luck with that by the way. I never can remember where I've stored them when I do that! Bulbs need soil with good drainage.

Heavy clay soils are not a really good location for spring flowering bulbs. Poorly drained soils result in bulbs that don't last long due to rots and drowning. IF you want to add organic matter like peat moss or something, you need to amend the soil about twice as deep as what you are going to be planting them. Dig an area up and add about 1/3 by volume of good organic matter, mix it well with the soil and then replace it, then dig into this to plant your bulbs. If you just amend the soil that's going in on top of the bulb, you create an in-ground container that water will infiltrate easily, get to the bottom of the planting hole and just stop. Hence the need to amend the soil below as well. Make sure you plant the bulbs as deep as the instructions call for or use the rule of thumb that they should be 2 to 3 times as deep as they are wide. Settle the soil and add a little fertilizer! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.