

Gardening with Chuck Programs for April 19 - May 2, 2021

Orchardgrass

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I had my first sample of orchardgrass brought in to the office from a local lawn last week. Orchardgrass is a cool season perennial grass that is often found as a seed contaminant in cheaper tall fescue seed. It is very noticeable in the spring because it grows faster than the fescue, is much paler green, almost yellowish green, it has very flat stems at the base and tends to sprawl open as it grows. Once we get through the spring growth spurt it's less noticeable, but still there. It is too similar to fescue - we can't spray anything and control JUST the orchardgrass. So you either live with it, or spray the clumps with glyphosate, dig them out when they die, replace the soil and overseed. And since you've probably already applied crabgrass preventer to your lawn, you can't reseed until this fall, with better quality seed! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Cold Weather

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I made a bold statement in a program last week that it wouldn't be cold enough to do any damage to ornamental and garden plants IF they were planted in the right time frame. After I recorded that program they changed the weather forecast and we ended up with frosty weather three nights in a row. Fortunately it did not seem to get as cold as they predicted it might and my prognostication likely held up. Most locations did not see cold enough temperatures to do much damage to fruit trees that were blooming. Early season garden crops should have been untouched by those temperatures. IF you had to push the season and planted some tomatoes or peppers, you may very well see some cold injury or at least some cold shock on them. And I give you no sympathy because I told you so!!! How do you know if it's cold shock? Tomato leaves developing a purple coloration are a tell tale sign! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Rhubarb Seed Stalks

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. It's this time of year, every year, that I curse not having gotten my rhubarb patch established yet. Rhubarb is a love hate relationship for most people and I'm in the love camp. One thing that happens with rhubarb is that under certain conditions in the spring it will send up seed stalks. Trust me, you'll know them the minute you see them and if you aren't sure just break one off - it'll have a hollow stem. If you leave them the plant will put energy into flowering and growing seed. You don't want that as it takes away from the leaf production and it's the leaf stalks that we eat. As soon as you see a seed stalk, cut it out or break it out. The plants will continue to do this for several weeks so just stay vigilant and check the plants 2 or 3 times a week removing them when you find them. Newer cultivars of rhubarb are less prone to doing this. And never start new rhubarb plants from seed to reduce this risk. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Eastern Tent Caterpillars

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. While I haven't seen any yet this year, this is the time of year that eastern tent caterpillars will show up in a variety of plants. Egg clusters are laid in the fall and when these hatch they form a webby mass right down in the crotch of branches. The small caterpillars spend the night in this webby mass or nest if you will and then venture out in the day to feed on the foliage. While their feeding won't directly kill a plant they can sure weaken it and hurt fruit production if it is a fruit tree or shrub. You may well want to spray them or at least break and tear up the webby nest. Young caterpillars are eaten by birds when they can get to them. Larger caterpillars may have to be sprayed as they become hairy and less likely to be eaten by birds as the hairs are a deterrent. Small caterpillars can be treated with a Bt based insecticide. Larger caterpillars will require pyrethroid based sprays. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Termites or Ants

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. With some of the precipitation we've had, and some likely still to come, coupled with warm weather both termites and ants will start swarming soon. It's a natural thing and it's how both ant and termite colonies multiply and spread. The sight of it happening will put the fear into any homeowner. The first thing you need to do BEFORE you panic is to determine if they are ants or termites, and they really are easy to tell apart. There are three characteristics to look for and any one of them can differentiate between the two. Ants are related to wasps and have a thin wasp like waist. Termites are thick bodied all the way through. The antenna of ants have obvious elbows or joints. Termites antennas are smoothly curved. Lastly, termites have two pairs of wings and the two pairs are the same length. Ants have two pairs of wings but the two are different sizes. Or just catch some and bring them to me! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.