

## Gardening with Chuck Programs for January 24 - 30, 2022

### Fertilizer Shock (Prices)

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. In the agricultural world producers are painfully aware that fertilizer prices are up anywhere from 100 to 200% in the past six months. Guess what? They use the same basic fertilizers that homeowners do for lawns and gardens. As we head into the spring growing season and you stock up on your lawn or garden fertilizers, or receive that proposal from your lawn care company, you may want to brace yourself for some sticker shock. Fortunately for gardeners, we use much less fertilizer than farmers do and we aren't concerned about covering expenses. But this may be a year to focus lawn fertilizers in the fall and forego those early spring and early summer treatments just to save you a few dollars. And maybe, just maybe, you should consider soil testing your lawn and your garden! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

## Potato Production

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Potatoes are a staple food source for most Americans. I was surprised that average annual US consumption of fresh potatoes was only 30 pounds per person per year. I was also surprised that annual average potato chip consumption was over 6 pounds. We can grow potatoes in our gardens fairly effectively. Potatoes are cool weather plants so do best with an early spring planting from mid March to early April or with a fall garden crop being planted in July. Many people have their favorite old line potato cultivars like Kennebec, Cobbler or Red Pontiac. But there are many newer varieties with better yield and disease resistance. Potatoes are heavy feeders and benefit from acidic soils. Since the potatoes are only produced above the seed piece, you'll need to hill them up well as they grow. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

## Vegetable Variety Selection

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Home gardeners have their favorite cultivars that they will search high and low to find, so they can plant them. The problem is that tradition often gets in the way of progress. Some of those trusty cultivars are still excellent producers while in other cases, they simply are beset by low production or worse yet, disease issues. This is especially true in tomatoes. Heirloom varieties often confound the issue even more. Many gardeners like the heirloom cultivars because of particular taste attributes. But heirloom cultivars are often beset with less disease resistance so production management needs are greater. I don't have an issue with heirlooms, just know what you're getting into. If you want to consider some new vegetable varieties pick up the K-State bulletin on Recommended Vegetable Varieties from our office. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

## Grow Your Mulch Zones

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When new trees are planted we always encourage homeowners to put a nice organic mulch over the root zone to hold moisture, keep the soil cooler and keep weed competition down. Which is frequently done for a few years. But then the organic mulch breaks down, grass starts creeping into the mulch zone and then it's all gone. There's a lot of evidence that as the tree grows, we should grow that mulch zone right with it, perhaps for the first ten years or more. Grass is a serious competitor for water and nutrients AND if grass is growing next to the tree, here comes the bark damaging weed eater. I'd encourage you to expand that mulch zone every spring and apply new organic mulch. Trees will grow faster and be healthier when they don't have to compete with the creeping green death known as grass! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

## Still Too Early for Broadleaf Herbicides

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I walked out to my mailbox one evening last week and in the ditch at the end of my driveway was a fresh dandelion bloom in all its yellow glory. I just stopped and looked at it. Even in between rounds of single digit temperatures, many of these early spring blooming weeds are growing. I saw henbit in a warm spot near a building that will probably be blooming sometime next week in spite of temperatures approaching zero. But just because these plants are growing, it doesn't mean you should be out trying to spray them. Even on nice days with temperatures above 50, control will be poor at best. You're better off to wait until March IF you didn't treat last fall. Or, you can be like Chuck, and basically don't treat the weeds at all. Those early blooming plants, okay weeds, are crucial food for our pollinators! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

