

Gardening With Chuck for December 31 - January 6, 2013

Leave the snow and ice alone

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We had a touch of winter here and more to the north. I got to spend some time with family over Christmas in Omaha where they had a bunch more snow than we did. A lot of trees and shrubs were still loaded down with the snow a good week after the storm event. I noticed a few homeowners out trying to remove some of that snow load and I just cringed! Humans have the idea that they can do better than mother nature and that mother nature needs our help. My experience and observation has usually been that once humans get involved, things really get fouled up! Trees and shrubs bend under the weight of snow and ice because that is how they survive. Yes, under extreme conditions the weight of snow and ice can and will break limbs and even entire trees. But more often the snow and ice load bends the branches down or the trees over and after the wind blows some of the snow off or the sun melts it off then the trees slowly return to their normal shape none the worse for wear. But when people go out with brooms, rakes or sticks and start trying to knock off the snow and ice, little benefit rarely comes of it. The process of removing the snow often damages limbs that would have been fine if they'd been left alone. There is also a risk to the homeowner who is out there trying to be helpful. Snow and ice can be very heavy on limbs. Tree limbs or even entire trunks can be at such a stress that they are near the failing point and you in your good intentions could cause a limb to break and come crashing down. So, when it snows or ices, tend to yourself and leave the trees alone! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

Chuck Otte.

A Gardeners New Year's Resolutions

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The start of a new year is always a good time to reflect on yourself and how you could do better and that includes you, and me, as gardeners. So here's a couple of gardener's New Year's resolutions. I resolve to not look at a single garden seed or plant catalog until March 1st.... well maybe February 15th. Those catalogs are hitting the mailbox as I talk and given some of the weather the end of December, gardening season sounds really good and then there goes the fever and you are ordering everything under the sun. Take time and relax and get your plans together and then order to fit within your plans. I resolve to be less of a lawn-aholic. Lawn-aholics are those homeowners that always have to have the greenest lawn that are mowing the earliest in the season and sometimes even the earliest in the day. We need to remember that we live in a prairie state, not England. We don't have to have a lawn that looks like it's an English Manor. It's okay to have a couple of dandelions. There is a great cost, both monetary and environmental to having the picture perfect yard. Turf grass is the most expensive crop, per acre, that we grow in Kansas and it's purely for aesthetics. We waste a lot of water and send a lot of fertilizer nutrients and pesticides down the gutter and into our surface waters. Become more lawn wise this spring - hint, I'll be holding a Lawn 101 class in early March - water and fertilize less and learn to work with the lawn. So, as we move deeper into 2013, just resolve to be a smarter gardener and learn how to WORK with your plants for better results! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Soil amendments - what do we need?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As you plan your garden or new flower beds or new landscape beds or maybe even a new lawn for 2013, are you also planning some time spent on working on the soil? Soil is the heart of a good garden. It is the baseline that everything begins with and it's often the most abused and undercared for part of the whole gardening equation. In this part of the country we have some good soil and a lot of soil that needs a lot of work. We have soils that grow good native grasses, but that isn't what we need for most of our gardening and landscaping needs. It really starts with the soil and if we spend a lot of time getting the soil prepped and ready, everything else is a piece of cake. We want something that we can spread or spray on our garden that will fix everything and I'm hear to tell you that there is no quick and easy fix. The one thing that every soil needs is more organic matter. Our soils have lots of clay and that clay inhibits root development, water intake, plant growth - you just name it! You can't add a little sand and make a difference, you need to add organic matter. I'm not talking fine compost that's already broken down, I'm talking raw organic matter. Leaves, straw, cottonseed hulls, old silage, big bulky organic matter that's a pain to work into the ground. As it breaks down in the soil it will create larger pores that water can move through and roots can grow into. And you need to add it just about every year. Yes, adding organic matter into the soil every year is hard work. But just keep doing it for a few years and you will quickly tell a difference in your plants! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK,

I'm Chuck Otte.