

Millipedes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Periodically I'll start to receive calls from homeowners about little brown worms swarming on the sides of their houses and coming inside. When disturbed these worms tend to coil up in a spiral. When you step on them they crunch, rather disgustingly actually, and they seem to have a lot of little legs. Well, if you have had this problem this fall, congratulations, you have millipedes. They are not insects, they have too many legs, but they are an arthropod and as such are an insect relative. They are in a different family from centipedes - two pairs of legs per body segment versus one pair of legs, and they are different from roly polys, pillbugs or sowbugs which are actually crustaceans. Millipedes feed mainly on decaying organic matter so anytime we've had droughty conditions followed by a lot of rain or simply very regular rain that keeps this old dead organic matter moist, we will usually see a population explosion. This often happens in the spring and early summer, but this year, with the rain we had in July and August, we had a fall population explosion. As the weather started to cool down this fall, they started massing on the sides of buildings, sometimes to keep warm, but other times looking for a place to move into for the winter. While they won't do any damage in your home, they can be disgusting and unwelcome. The best approach is to first and foremost try to get the house sealed up so they can't gain entrance. You can also spray a barrier on the foundation and three feet out away from the house with cyfluthrin, prochloraz or permethrin. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.

Cleaning off Flower Beds

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I've spent a lot of time this fall talking about cleaning up vegetable gardens but haven't said much about cleaning off flower beds. If your flower beds are protected, like ours are, they can go well into the winter and manage to evade the hard freezes, although the season is pretty well over now. In the old days we'd expect zinnias and marigolds and petunias to reseed themselves. And to some extent they may still. But over the years most of those old standards have become hybridized to get those awesome colors and those great big flowers and other desirable characteristics. Oft times these hybrids simply won't produce viable seed or if they do, like hybrids will, they won't be just like the parent plants but start to recess back to the original parents. So in many cases, especially with our annual bedding plants, there is no need to leave the dead plants out there after they've frozen off. So cut them down and move them to the compost pile. But in some cases, I like to leave the plants out there through the winter. Mums and many other perennials can benefit from leaving the old plants in the garden all winter long. The old plants will often trap leaves and other garden debris adding an extra layer of insulation from cold winter weather. But you do need to remember to get out there in late winter or early spring and clear the old plants off before spring growth begins. In other cases, such as sunflowers, birds especially finch species, will come in and feed on the seeds. Later on the little Downy Woodpeckers will look for insect on the stems, so it's ok to leave these also. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Compost pile management

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We don't have enough gardeners using compost piles and those that do use them seldom manage them right. A compost pile should be a turbo charged compilation of soil, organic matter, fungi, bacteria, moisture and nutrients. When working properly the structural organic matter in a compost pile will be broken down into its components in a matter of weeks. If not properly managed a compost pile will be a soggy stinking rotting mass or a dirty hay pile. Compost piles beyond the basic ingredients that go into it, need two things to operate most efficiently, moisture and oxygen. Without the proper balance of these two, you'll have one of the two previously mentioned outcomes. The biggest challenge that I find in our region is keeping the compost pile moist. This time of year, if you have a fairly fresh compost pile, it should be warm enough that it is steaming in the cool mornings. If you have a compost pile thermometer it should be in the 130 to 140 degree range. If it isn't, check first of all to make sure it is moist. If you dig into the middle of it and you squeeze the compost pile contents and they just spring back out, then it isn't wet enough. Water it down. If, on the other hand, you are squeezing water out of it then it is too wet and you may need to turn it and aerate it, or use a compost pile aerator, to get more oxygen in to the center to help the right bacteria and fungi break down the organic matter as opposed to just rotting it! We do have a good bulletin on composting at the extension office, call or stop by if you'd like a copy of it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.