

To Rake or Not to rake

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. So, to paraphrase Hamlet from the Shakespearean play of the same name, to rake, or not to rake - that is the question! Well, so far it hasn't really been much of a question because leaves are just now getting around to starting to fall. But what about when it's a few weeks from now and the trees are fixing to be pretty barren of leaves. Do we rake the yard or not? Surprisingly there has been a lot of research done on this very topic and what has been found is that a certain amount of leaves on a lawn really isn't a problem. Now before that gets misinterpreted, lets get the rest of the details out there. You can get too many leaves on a lawn especially if they get matted down with heavy rain or snow. We had that a few years ago and wound up with a total mess. Heavy leaf loads need to be removed either by raking, mowing and bagging or letting a large wind blow them away! We do know that if you get out there and mow regularly, effectively shredding the leaves, natural breakdown can help take care of a lot of the leaves. If you have a foot of leaves in your lawn though, or an inch or two of very small leaves, then removal is in order. Now, don't forget that leaves, especially when bagged with a lawnmower while mowing grass, makes for great mulch or compost. I like to back up a bunch of leaves every fall to mulch down my garlic in early December. You can also add them to a garden and till them in. Or you can simply add to the compost pile or just start a compost mound. The combo of leaves and grass clipping brings great carbon nitrogen balance and a good compost! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What to do with grass 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. There are several schools of thought about what to do with mowing height of lawn grasses in the fall. One school says that after about the first of November you just let it go. If the grass keeps growing a lot, as can happen, you just let it grow and fall over and it becomes extra insulation for the lawn. Well, this can work as long as you don't have a lot of leaves or a lot of snow. Excessive fall growth that gets matted down under leaves or heavy rain or heavy snow can wind up smothering new growth in the spring, it can actually kill parts of the lawn, basically just be a real problem. In dry climates this approach may be fine, but I generally feel it is too risky, unless you plan to burn your lawn off in late February. Another school of thought says that just about as the lawn grasses are going dormant you mow it as low as you can. That way all that potential old dead grass is gone and out of the way so when spring growth starts your lawn appears to green up a lot quicker. Again, while it may sound good, it isn't recommended. Mowing low can open up a lot of soil to the sun which could result in late germination of a lot of weeds as well as allowing colder air to get right down to the soil causing more potential freeze damage to grass crowns. The right thing to do is to just keep mowing within the recommended heights, fescue at 3.5 inches and bluegrass at 3. If, as the very last mowing of the year you want to drop it a half inch to get that early greenup look going, that's fine, but to be right honest, I'd rather you wait and do that the very first mowing in the spring. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Storing Tender bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As many of us are busy planting tulips and daffodils, we also need to be remembering to start digging those tender bulbs or rootstocks of those frost sensitive, meaning non winter hardy, perennials. This includes things like gladiolus, caladium, dahlia, tuberous begonias, calla lilies and canna lilies. All of these need to be dug after frost has browned the foliage. I'll be the first to admit that I've had many of these over winter in warm and protected spots in the yard, but if you want to make sure that they survive, then you need to be getting them dug and packed away for the winter. Contrary to some popular opinions, these plants won't die if they get frosted - in fact we need a frost to shut them down and put them into dormancy. After that has happened, and it should have in most locations, dig them and let them dry in a shady, well ventilated area protected from rain.... if it rains. This drying will take at least a week, maybe longer depending on temperature, humidity and wind speed. Once everything is well dried down, carefully removed all the old vegetation and carefully removed soil and dead rootlets. Don't wash them, just gently rub the dirt off. Now you want to pack them away in boxes containing peat moss, perlite or vermiculite. You don't want any one bulb, root or corm touching another one. If one were to start to rot, it'd quickly spread from one to the other if they were touching. Using a dustable fungicide will help protect from storage rots. Store caladiums at 50 to 60 degrees and the others around 40 degrees if at all possible, and of course in a dry location! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.