

## Peony Management

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Peonies are a very popular perennial flower. The huge clumps of dark green foliage are often found at old farmsteads and even if the house is gone, the peony clumps are still there. Every country cemetery has to have at least a few peony clumps. They bloom in spring but by this time of year they can look quite bedraggled. So it will probably make more than one person happy to know that by the first of September, even though the plants may still be nicely green, they are effectively dormant. Now, I don't like to just mow them off. While this is a very effective way to remove the foliage it also scatters all that leaf material everywhere and that includes all the little disease spores that cause those leafspots every year. What you need to do is to cut the plants off at the base, right at ground level. Then carefully remove all that foliage and put it in the trash, the burn pile or the compost pile. Then I like to take a garden rake and rake a little soil off the crown and even that up. Soil tends to collect around the base of peony plants and if the soil gets too deep, the peonies will slowly quit blooming. If your peonies have gotten too big and you want to separate them and get more plants started, fall is the time to do that. Peony plants don't have to be separated, they can stay in place a long time. BUT if you want more plants, dig them up in the fall cut off some divisions and get them re-planted. You need to be careful to have the pink eyes or buds just one inch below the soil surface, deeper than 2 inches and they won't bloom. Make sure that your root divisions have 3 to 4 eyes. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.

## Gardening Odds and Ends

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There's several things going on in vegetable gardens that may need your attention this time of year. Continue to keep your tomatoes and peppers well watered as they will continue to bear clear up to a freeze. Remember that once a tomato starts to develop even a little of the pink, red or orange color they have all the flavor compounds laid down and you can harvest them and bring them indoors to finish ripening, safely away from weather and insects. This is a good hint for bringing in tomatoes just ahead of a frost. Winter squash are one of my favorite garden crops. Just for fun I even planted one hill of acorn squash real late this year to see if I can sneak in an extra crop. Unlike summer squash that you want to harvest when they are very immature, you want to make sure that winter squash is nicely mature. Color is one indicator - butternut changes from light beige to dark tan. Acorn starts off green, but the ground spot, which, yes, is where it sits on the ground, changes from yellow to orange when its ripe and hubbards tend to become gray or orange. Hard tough rinds are another indicator of ripeness. If your thumbnail or fingernail easily punches through the skin, it's not mature enough yet. Ideal storage conditions for winter squash is 55 to 60 degrees. An unheated garage often works very well for squash storage. Finally, if you have strawberries, quickly get out there and apply  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a pound of actual nitrogen per 100 foot of strawberry row. That would be about 4 to 6 pounds of a 12-12-12 fertilizer. Then water this in to help stimulate flower buds! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## A Weed Eater is Not a Mower!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I saw it again the other day and it just drives me nuts! Somebody was using a line trimmer, a.k.a a weed eater, as a lawn mower! A weed eater is not a lawn mower. A lawn mower is designed to utilize a very sharp metal blade that is held solidly in a metal frame to cleanly cut grass, or sometimes weeds, at a neatly uniform height throughout the lawn or area being mowed. The sharp blade, in slicing the leaves off creates a cut or a wound that seals over quickly and neatly. On the other hand, a line trimmer or weed eater uses a relatively thick piece of nylon or plastic string to essentially shred it's way through the leaf blade resulting in a very ragged cut that takes longer to dry down and leaves you a wide area of shredded leaf blade that then dies off even leaving little white caps on each leaf blade. By it's very nature a weed eater is designed to be very mobile to facilitate getting in around buildings, poles, fences where the lawnmower leaves an inch or two of uncut vegetation. Because of it's mobility it has no height control which results in becoming very easy to have a very unevenly trimmed height if you are mowing across a lawn like area. Quite honestly it was never designed to mow a large open expanse of vegetation. Invariably, in an effort to keep a uniform height, the operator just keeps getting it lower and lower until you are removing vegetation at one inch of height or less which then opens up a lot of bare soil for weeds to start moving in to as we move through the fall. Use a weed eater for trimming and a mower for large areas. Your lawn will thank you! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.