Gardening With Chuck for June 16 - 22, 2014

Watering in a wet spell

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay folks, it's gotten a bit on the damp side since the first of June. This can create a lot of challenges for the home gardener, especially in dealing with the watering regimen. Junction City basically received 4 inches of rain last week in two rainfall events. There is enough soil moisture even with the warmer conditions that we are seeing, to last at least two weeks without any need for lawn irrigation. I've been seeing way too many automatic sprinkler systems running when the ground is already saturated. That is wasting water and creating some serious health problems for plants. If you have an automatic system, you need to learn how to shut it off, if it doesn't have moisture sensors, and then do shut it off when we get heavy rains. There is no reason at this time of year and the rains we've received to be watering your lawns. Potted plants, flower beds and gardens are another story. Potted plants are in potting soil that has much higher drainage rates and much lower moisture holding capacity. After a couple three days of no rain, it's probably time to start watering those pots again. Flower and vegetable gardens can be trickier. Some plants can have extensive roots systems by mid July while others may not. After a period of heavy rains, you can usually figure 4 to 5 days of grace period, but then you have to start checking plants if there's been no more rain. Check plants first thing in the morning. All plants will wilt in the bright sun if the temperature is up to 90. But once it cools down in the evening, or the next morning, if it is still looking wilty, it's time to water again! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC,

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Fertilization when it's wet

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Not all soil nutrients behave the same way. Phosphorus is slow to work into the soil, but once it's in the soil it isn't going to go anywhere unless plants use it. Potassium is often the most limiting nutrient in our soils, well, other than nitrogen anyway. Likewise, potassium doesn't move much in the soil, but fortunately for us, our soils naturally have very high potassium levels. Nitrogen is a different beast. In it's natural and common forms in the soil, and there are several forms, it often is very mobile in the soil water. It can be spread on the surface of the soil and just a little bit of water will carry it into the root zone very easily. But excessive rain can continue to move it right on out of the root zone as well. Not only is it very mobile, it is rather volatile also. It can be converted, under the right conditions to one of several gaseous forms so that it will dissipate right up into the atmosphere. Remember, the major gas in our planets atmosphere is nitrogen. Sometimes our soils become waterlogged, like we saw following the rains last week. It only takes a couple of days of waterlogged conditions and we start to lose nitrogen from our soils in a hurry. What this means is that when we have heavy rainfall periods, it becomes essential that we supplement the nitrogen in our vegetable gardens and flower beds. This process is called side dressing and we simply use a nitrogen containing fertilizer and dribble a little bit beside the row or broadcast over the top. Be careful though, especially with tomatoes because excessive nitrogen results in big plants and no tomatoes! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fertilizing warm season grasses

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. While most of us have lawn grasses like fescue and bluegrass, that we call cool season grasses, there are some folks that prefer grasses like buffalo grass, Bermuda grass and zoysia. These grasses are called warm season grasses and are a totally different beast. We fertilize cool season grasses heavily in the fall and to a lesser extent in the spring to coincide with when they are most actively growing. In the summer we tend to back off on the fertilization as they aren't growing as much then. As their name implies, warm season grasses prefer the heat of summer to do their growing and that's when their nutrient needs are greatest. Now, buffalo grass is native to Kansas and is actually more adapted to western Kansas. It tends to be an open type turf and in wet years can be invaded by weeds and in fact weeds tend to make better use of nitrogen than does the buffalo grass. Bottom line, maybe fertilize buffalo grass once a year in late May or early June. But Bermuda and zoysia are different. They can be thick and aggressive grasses, which may be a blessing or a curse, and they actually do better when they are pushed hard and fed heavily. To get maximum performance out of your Bermuda or zoysia lawn, you should fertilize it with about a pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in early June, July and August. Keep in mind that when you push these grasses like this, you will be mowing more. AND it brings up the need that zoysia especially needs to be vertical cut about once every five years to keep it from getting to sod bound. But if you have these grasses, fertilize now! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.