

Gardening With Chuck for October 27 - November 2, 2014

Tree leaves and turf

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A question I regularly receive this time of year has to do with how many tree leaves can lawn grasses tolerate. The bottom line is that if you can get the leaves well enough shredded up that they don't mat down and block the sunlight from getting to the leaf blades, then there isn't an issue. And a good mulching mower can in fact pulverize quite a few leaves. But here's what I'd rather see you do. I'd rather see you put that bagger that many of you are in love with to good use as a leaf collector. Mow at the normal height of 3 to 3.5 inches but collect those few grass clippings with all those leaves and then start a big pile for composting purposes or, once you get the leaves cleaned up, start adding them to the soil of gardens and flower beds this fall. Leaves in the fall, with the exception of walnut leaves, are the best thing to add to soil to improve it. Forget sand as a soil amendment, it isn't practical to add enough to make a difference. The way to loosen up heavy clay soils is with organic matter and leaves are a great source of organic matter. Add as many leaves to gardens and flower beds as you can till in. Spread out a bunch of leaves, broadcast one to two pounds of high nitrogen fertilizer over the top and then work the leaves into the soil. The nitrogen will serve as a jump start and a food source for the microbes that break down the organic matter. If it is really dry after you work them into the soil, a good watering will also help to get things going. You can also use the leaves to mulch tender plants. Just please, don't waste the leaves by. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Still plenty of time to plant bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If you've been busy or you just happened to find a good deal on some spring flowering bulbs, or even garlic, go ahead and buy them as there is still plenty of time to get those planted. You can plant spring flowering bulbs clear up into December or even early January as long as the ground isn't frozen. The later you plant them this fall, the later they will bloom next spring, but after that, they will be on a more normal cycle. There are several things to keep in mind whenever you plant your bulbs in the fall. First of all, plant as many as you can. The more bulbs you can plant the more impressive the display will be. Massing 8 to 20 tulip or daffodil bulbs into a relatively small area will create quite a display when they bloom. The planting of drifts, of a compact batch of bulbs that will produce a lot of flowers in one location, has long been used in many of the gardens of Europe for spectacular effect. Make sure you plant the bulbs deep enough. If the directions say to plant six inches deep, that's six inches to the top of the bulb after you've planted it, not to the bottom of the planting hole. Planting deeper will also increase the length of time between when you have to dig and reset those bulbs. I also like to dig a hole quite a bit deeper than required and then mix some compost of tree leaf litter in with the soil at the bottom of the hole and then mix some bone meal in too before planting. The organic matter will improve root development and drainage and the bone meal will be an excellent source of phosphorus for several years. So find some deals on bulbs and plant! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Winter storage of summer bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We grow many summer flowers from bulbs, roots, rhizomes and corms that are not really winter hardy. So if we want to make sure that we'll have those plants around next year we need to dig up those root portions, whatever they may be or called, and safely store them away until spring. Don't be in a hurry to dig these plants. It's best to wait until a frost has browned the foliage. Not only does this start the dormancy process going, it also helps to dry down the plant making it easier to work with. Dig them carefully and then allow them to dry for a week or two in a shady dry well ventilated area like a garage or a tool shed. After they've dried down, cut off the rest of the above ground portions and carefully remove any excess soil. Now it gets tricky. You want to start packing these in boxes with peat moss, vermiculite or perlite. You don't want any one plant part touching another one. If they are in contact with each other and one starts to rot, the rot will just spread from one to the other. By isolating or perhaps insulating them with peat moss, vermiculite or perlite you may lose one bulb, but it won't take out the entire collection. I prefer to pack only one species in a box and then mark the box well. Don't trust your memory! Mark it!! Caladiums prefer storage temperatures between 50 and 60 degrees. Don't get these too cool as they will cold shock. The rest of the bulbs or roots can be stored around 40 degrees. An unheated attached garage often works well for this or placing them in an unfinished basement against a wall and away from the furnace! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.