

Gardening Tips for October 26 - November 1, 2015

Do I have to rake up my leaves?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I am frequently asked, especially by the male side of the household, if they really have to rake up the leaves in their yard. I suspect that someone in the household thinks they should be raked up while someone else would rather be inside on Saturdays watching football. The bottom line is that if you have a lot of leaves, and especially if they may get a rain or snow on them that would mat them down and smother the turf, then yes. But often, in all honesty, it isn't necessary to rake leaves. I half jokingly often tell folks that if you just wait a little while, they'll blow into someone else's yard. What I am fond of doing is to mow the lawn, keeping the mower set at the proper height, and shred as many of the leaves as possible. This is a great way to start the break down process. Studies done at Michigan State University used a mulching mower to shred up to 1 pound of leaves per square yard, which is about six inches of leaves piled on your yard. After five years they found no long term effect of the shredded leaves on turf quality, soil test results or other soil measurements, But if you are going to take this approach, be sure to shred them with a mulching mower. What I would almost prefer to do is to use that mower to bag up the leaves, or rake them in the traditional way, and then spread them over gardens or flower beds and till them into the soil to improve soil quality. Or pile them up and compost them to use later on. So the short answer is no, you don't have to rake up the leaves. But the longer answer is, you need to do something, just don't waste the resource! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Hardiness of cool season vegetables

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We are already past our average first fall frost date and most areas have not yet seen a frost. We may by the end of this week, maybe, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we are well into November before we start to have overnight lows into the 20s. Many garden crops, especially those we plant in late summer for that fall garden, can take temperatures into the mid 20s before we start to see damage. Most of the cole crops, including cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts, as well as kale, turnips and carrots are some of the hardiest of our vegetable crops. Many of the leafy vegetables as well as potatoes and beets, are slightly less hardy but still can take light frosts with little damage. So as long as you want to continue harvesting, keep watering those hardy crops. You can also extend the season even longer by using floating row covers. Floating row covers are a gauzy type of material that allow light to penetrate but offers some protection against light frosts allowing you to take these crops even later into the season. The next step is to do low hoops that provide even more protection. One other thing about many of these veggie crops. Many of these, especially the root crops like beets, carrots, parsnips, turnips, even Irish potatoes, can be left in the ground and mulched to be dug later in the fall or early winter as long as the ground hasn't frozen. The one thing that you really need to be getting out of the ground before it does frost or freeze is your sweet potatoes. If you haven't dug these yet I would get them out soon so they aren't damaged by frost! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Putting the mower away for winter

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many people I know can't wait to start mowing the lawn in the spring and can't wait to mow the lawn for the last time in the fall and be done with the lawn mower. Now, I'll be the first to admit that the latter actually describes me fairly well. I well admit that I have been known to park the lawnmower sometime in late October or November without giving it a second thought. The following spring it has sometimes started pretty well, and sometimes been a bit of a problem to get started. So in the interest of fairness, the falling is a description of what you SHOULD do, but not necessarily what I actually do in the fall. Once you are done and know you won't be using your lawn mower or other equipment with small gas engines, you should start by draining the gas tank or at least add a gasoline stabilizer. Change the oil. Change the air filter or clean it if it is a reusable oil and foam air filter. Pull the spark plug and replace it but before you put the new one back in, squirt a few drops of oil in the spark plug hole to lubricate the cylinder. If you equipment has a battery, remove it and then clean all the corrosion off the posts and terminal connectors. Store the battery in a protected location like a cool basement. Also clean all grease, oil, dirt or other debris off the equipment. Then as the last thing to do, remove the blades from the mower and sharpen them so you are ready to go in the spring. If you aren't comfortable sharpening you own mower blade, I can provide you instructions if you like, take it to a business that does sharpen blades and then treat the blade with oil. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

Chuck Otte.