

### Cutting Back Ornamental Grasses

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Ornamental grasses are very popular in many home landscapes. What we once used to call pampas grass now can be one of dozens of different species. Some get quite tall, others are quite tidy and some are rather small. What they all have in common though is the need to be cut back each year. Many of us wait until now to do it, but we need to be getting going on it soon. There are many ways to go after these clumps of grass. Hedge shears can be used as can a circular blade on a weed whip. Even a chain saw can be used, but be sure to use the top of the bar, not the bottom so you don't pull in a lot of material and clog it up. General we want to cut these off 2 to 4 inches above the ground. Sometimes it is helpful to cut off the extra tall seed stalks first and then tie the remaining vegetation together with twine to keep it from scattering everywhere. If you find that the center of the clump is hollowing out, it is probably time to dig up the clump, separate it and reset the vigorous growth from the outer part of the ring. One of the best ways to deal with the old growth, if you live out in the country where it is legal to do so, is to burn it off. A few cautions on this from the voice of experience. Do not use fire if the plants are within about 15 feet of any evergreen. These grasses burn hot and fast and you can damage pines, cedars or spruces from the heat, or even catch them on fire. Make sure the wind speeds are under 10 mph and have a garden hose charged and ready before you light the first clump, and if you live in Geary county be sure to have a burn permit and call in first! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Shrub Pruning

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As we get these nice March days, the spring fever tends to really ramp up and then homeowners are out in the yard looking for anything to do.

Since lawns are just now starting to get growing there isn't much to do there, so the next thing you know, they've grabbed the pruning shears or hedge trimmer and they are heading out to do business. This is the point that I have to jump up and yell STOP! You need to know which species of shrubs you are working on or you could be setting yourself up for a big

disappointment later on this spring or even do damage to your plants. If you have evergreen shrubs, usually things like junipers, yews, boxwood or holly, you can probably prune them now.

Hollies can have reduction of berry production with a spring pruning, but otherwise you shouldn't see much problem with a late winter or early spring pruning. With deciduous shrubs though, you want to go forward carefully. Any shrub that blooms first thing in the spring, like forsythia, quince, lilac or spirea, produced the flower buds late last summer. Pruning them now can result in your removing most of the flower buds which will leave you with few blossoms.

Prune these right after they finish blooming in the spring. You can prune these fairly hard at that time. Shrubs that bloom later in the year, like Rose-of-Sharon, Pyracantha, Bumald or Japanese Spirea, and roses, haven't yet made their flower buds so you can prune these now without reducing flowers later on. So take some time to recognize what shrub species you have and then prune them at the right time! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Pine Wilt

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 no species of pine trees native to Kansas, so it should be no surprise that we are challenged to grow pines here. For decades, pine trees have suffered through various needle diseases which, with a timely spraying of fungicide, they would survive. Tip blight is the most common one and shows up on pines once they reach about 20 years of age and start to slow down their growth. Tip blight is easily diagnosed as it attacks and kills the new shoots in the spring before they are full size. The mature needles are not attacked so one can easily see older green needles and the tips of the pine branches are stunted and dead. Fungicides need to be applied in early April and again three weeks later. The far more serious disease is pine wilt. Pine wilt is what causes entire pine trees, usually in the late summer, to go from a green to a gray green to brown in a few weeks. When pine needles turn brown and don't fall off the tree it is never a good sign. Pine wilt is spread by a beetle called a pine sawyer. Unfortunately, controlling the pine sawyer simply isn't possible and the disease can not be easily prevented. There is a treatment but it is very expensive and has to be done every couple of years. The best way to slow down the spread of the disease is to cut down dead pine trees and burn up the trunk and branches. Since the pine sawyer adults start emerging in April, this removal and burning needs to be done now so that the beetles that are about to emerge and spread the disease are burned up before they have a chance. If you have issues with your pines, give me a call!

This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.