

Crazy Fall Weather!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We normally expect our first fall frost, described as a reading of 32 degrees or lower at the official weather recording station (Milford Lake Corps of Engineer's Office), on October 19th. Two years out of three the actual date will be within 12 days of the 19th. We are past that expected range. The latest we've ever had the first fall frost is November 10th (in 1998 by the way). At this time it appears that we'll go blowing right past that date and will set a new record late first frost date sometime later this month. Which is to say, put your normal end of yard and garden plans on hold for the interim. If you planted a new lawn, keep watering it at least once or twice a week, assuming that the grass has sprouted and is growing. Soil temperatures are running well above normal so that's going to continue. Keep mowing the lawn, assuming it's still growing like mine is, but just remember you need to keep mowing at that 3 to 3½ inches tall range - none of this scalping the lawn off low. If you haven't gotten lawns treated yet, there's still plenty of time. Long range forecasts are predicting daily highs in the 60s for a couple of weeks yet. Make sure that the temperature when you treat is above 50. For flower beds and vegetable gardens, if the plants are still growing, keep watering them. How many times have you been able to harvest fresh tomatoes in November? Of have begonias and impatiens still blooming in November. It's a crazy fall, and we may, or may not, pay for this later, but in the meantime, just keep plugging along like it was early October! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Where'd the Flies Come From?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I've had a lot of people asking me about an apparent abundance of flies this fall. Where are they coming from? What are they? What can we do about them? The biggest challenge facing us right now is the weather. By this time of November we'd normally expect daytime highs in the upper 50s, overnight lows near freezing and flies that overwinter as adults would be tucking themselves into hibernation mode! With warm weather, they are simply staying active and in some cases even reproducing, albeit at a slightly slower rate. What fly species is hard to say without one to look at. Some folks refer to these as attic flies, but attic flies is merely a generic term for flies that come into homes in the fall of the year to find some place to overwinter. In reality these could be house flies, face flies, horn flies, even stable flies. All of these flies develop as maggots living in manure or rotting vegetation. They are going to thrive when there's lots of moisture and warm temperatures so there's lots of rotting vegetation. All of these will try to come inside, some will try to bite, others will not, but their slow flying and buzzing around the house is annoying none the less. Keeping houses sealed up is the first step to slow them down. In closed in porches or attics or seldom used rooms you can try the no-pest strips. Aerosol spraying inside or premise spraying on the outside of your home is of little benefit for these pests. Ultimately, the best method may be a fly swatter or a vacuum cleaner, as you'll have it out to deal with lady beetles anyway. Cooler weather will help! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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Oak Leaf Itch Mite

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Last year we really were hammered by the oak leaf itch mite. As predicted, the numbers of these pests have not been quite as bad this year, for most people anyway, although a few local folks may disagree with that! Our friends to the east in the Kansas City area have not been so lucky this year and they have been getting hammered! Unfortunately, thanks to the wacky weather, no relief is in immediate sight. As a reminder, the oak leaf itch mite is predatory on a midge that causes the oak marginal leaf fold gall. There's nothing that can be done to control the itch mite and nothing that can be done to control the gall making midge. The itch mite's life cycle is basically only 7 days long. From July through fall, normally cold freezing weather that kills the leaves, , Adult mites fall from the oak leaves, primarily pin oaks but others in the red oak family group. At peak levels, over a quarter million itch mites per day can fall off of a large oak tree! The mites can blow for hundreds of miles in the wind. If they fall on people, the mite will bite to see if we are suitable hosts. We aren't, but the saliva causes bite marks to appear 10 to 16 hours later, generally above the waist often on the neck, shoulder or chest area, under loose fitting clothing, quite different from our traditional chiggers that bite below the waist under tight fitting clothing. Insect repellents do not work on these rascals. Avoid being under the trees until we've had hard freezes. If you have to work under a pin oak tree, take a shower as soon as you get in to try to get the mites off, and then use itch creams. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

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Perennial Garden Clean up

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With the warm weather we don't have a lot of folks starting to worry about cleaning up the perennial gardens just yet. BUT it will frost and freeze sometime, I hope anyway, and we'll have to do a little bit of work. With the exception of some plants that have disease issues, like peonies, or perennial plants that might have a risk associated with them, like a fire risk from ornamental grasses, you don't really have to do a lot of fall cleanup in perennial beds. In fact, I'm somewhat fond of leaving some perennials hanging on through the fall and winter. Many plants can provide structure, form and even color to the winter garden. Many perennials have much stronger and heftier stalks than annuals so they will stay upright during the winter. Think of what happens to begonias and Impatiens after a freeze. They just sort of melt down into a puddle of mush. But goldenrod and mums and Liatris freeze down and stay standing upright. These plants can provide shelter for small critters. Many of these plants have seeds that will be eaten by birds. Many of the perennials we grow are quite winter hardy, but those that are perhaps a little borderline can be benefitted by letting them stand and then packing leaves and other organic matter around them. Which is not to say that you shouldn't clean up perennial beds in the fall. Ultimately it is a personal choice and what you want to do. I'm still waiting for that freezing weather to clean up a couple places in my yard. But the rest of those landscape plants can just wait until spring. I'll get to it then, and in the meantime, there's football! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK,

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Keep Compost Piles Working

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'm a big believer in composting. Some think it's because I'm a tree hugging greenie, which is only partly true. The real reason I prefer to get as many things composted in yards as I do, is because our soils really need it. Most of our soils have inordinate amounts of clay. Clay makes them hard to work at anytime, and slow to dry out when it is wet. The best thing we can add to those soils is organic matter. Lots and lots of organic matter over time. The best way to do that is to take leaves and even grass clippings, but basically any organic matter source, and do an initial break down of the organic matter into compost. Composting sort of concentrates the organic matter and in many cases makes it much easier to add to the soil. With all the leaves we have at our disposal in the fall it's a great time to start a compost pile. Compost piles can be very complex or very simple. Even just a pile of leaves with a little old compost or soil mixed in, and then maybe a little nitrogen source, you can use organic or commercial fertilizer for that, and then moisture, is all it takes to get it started. The bacteria and fungi that make it happen need some warmth along with all the other things I've noted, but if you get the process started, an active compost pile will generate it's own warmth which you can see as it steams on cool mornings. You don't want a soggy compost pile because that means you don't have enough air involved, and you might make silage by accident. You don't want that. Stir the pile once a week or so and if we don't have rain and the pile seems dry, water it after you stir it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

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