

Winter Squash Harvest

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. From a botanists point of view, squash are squash and that includes pumpkins. They will all cross pollinate each other, they have the same number of chromosomes, it is one plant. But to us gardeners, there are big differences. Summer squash, like zucchini, are harvested when they are small and young and the entire plant is used in cooking. Pumpkins are pumpkins and used for decorations or for making deserts like pumpkin pie. By the way, you can fix pumpkin the same way you do winter squash! And since I don't care for pumpkin pie, I find it a far better way to utilize the fruit! But when we talk about winter squash we are talking about acorn squash or butternut or hubbard. Squash that we let go to maturity so it has a hard rind. We cut these open, scoop the seeds out and usually bake them. Man, I'm getting hungry just talking about it! Winter squash are planted later in the season, usually not until June so that they are developing mature fruit, squash, about the time of our first frost. We want these to be fully mature with typical skin coloration. Acorn squash will often develop a very dark orange area on the ground contact spot. I like to cut the stem carefully with clippers and leave it on the squash to improve storage life. If possible, cure at 80 to 85 degrees for about 10 days to toughen the rind. Then store at cool room temperature. If harvested at maturity and cured in this manner they can have a storage life of 2 to 3 months. While I've often seen them store longer than that, they will start to lose quality and not be as tasty. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Hackberry Psyllids

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 have hackberry trees then you have probably seen the little bumps on the leaves that they have every year. These bumps are caused by a little insect called the hackberry psyllid. In the bigger scheme of things, the hackberry psyllid doesn't harm the tree. The leaves still continue to work so we don't worry about controlling the psyllids as they are difficult if not impossible to control anyway. But in the fall, the adult psyllids, which look like a small gnat, though they aren't in that insect family, emerge from those galls on the leaves and they start looking for someplace to spend the winter. All too often they end up massing around our houses, often times covering the screens of our doors and windows. Some of them fly in when we come in, some come around the windows or right through the screens and others hitch rides on us as we come inside. Unfortunately coming inside our homes is a poor choice as most of them won't survive the dry winter air in our homes. They'd have been better off staying outside. The psyllids won't do any damage inside our homes, other than annoy us. They don't bite, although their point little legs can stick us when they land on us. Like many nuisance insects, they don't do any damage, they are just a nuisance. Spraying around the house with a garden insecticide will help, some. For those massing on our screens, spraying with an aerosol flying insect killer when there are large numbers will help. But ultimately, just keep the house shut up and hope for cold weather to come along soon and shut 'em down! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Branches on the ground

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This is the time of year that homeowners can start to find small branches, or even branch tips, on the ground. They pick them all up only to find a whole bunch more a few days later. There are several possible causes for this branch littering. The first is squirrels. Squirrels routinely bite off branch tips to build wintertime nests in trees. They will bite off a bunch of branch tips, drop them to the ground and then go pick them up and carry them to the tree. These branches are usually fairly short and if you look at the end, you'll usually find a very nice and neat angular slice like someone used a knife, or in this case, some very sharp teeth. The best thing to do is leave the branch tips on the ground so the squirrel can get enough material to build his nest and stop snipping off branch tips. Occasionally we'll also find blue jays in trees trying to harvest acorns. They can get kind of rowdy and in the process of trying to pull off acorns, the end of the branch may break off. These will always have acorns attached or a location where the acorns were attached. The last one will be the largest branch tips and the cut end will look like a miniature beaver had chewed all the way around. This is caused by an insect called a twig girdler. They lay eggs on the outer part of that branch, cut it off so it breaks in the wind and then the wind blows the branches around to move the insects to new locations. If you are finding these you should pick them up and burn them or put them in the trash to get the insects responsible out of your yard. And if you aren't sure what's doing it, call me! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Planting spring flowering bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Even though you often start seeing spring flowering bulbs like tulips and daffodils in stores in August, I don't like to plant them until the soil starts to cool down. Certainly go out and buy them when you see good deals but don't be in a hurry to plant them. Early planting can cause excessive fall growth which some years may have issues. If you do have early growth that appears above ground, don't worry, they won't develop a flower stalk until after they've gone through the wintery cold weather treatment. The other great thing about spring flowering bulbs is that if you wait until later in October or into November, you can get some great deals on bulbs as stores close them out to move them out of the way. What many gardeners don't realize is that you can plant bulbs clear into late autumn. I've even planted them in early January in mild years when the ground hadn't frozen yet. They bloom a little later the first spring, but after that there's no difference. Planting depth is important with bulbs. Read the directions that come with your bulbs. When they say to plant them six inches deep, I like to make that to the top of the bulb, not the bottom of the hole. Although often the directions will say to the bottom of the hole, don't worry, you'll be hard pressed to plant them too deep. Planting them too shallow is a giant no-no however. If you have heavy clay soils dig a larger hole and mix in peat moss or aged bark. Refill the hole to the proper depth and plant the bulbs, putting amended soil over the top. I also like to mix a little bone meal into the bottom of the planting hole! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Digging 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 plant many tender perennial flowers in our gardens. These include things like glads, caladium, dahlia, tuberous begonia, calla lily, and canna lily. All of these have a root portion, commonly but inappropriately called a bulb, that needs to be dug and brought inside to make sure that they survive the winter. Cannas and calla lilies are rhizomes. Caladiums and tuberous begonias have tubers, glads have a corm and dahlia's are a tuberous rooted plant. While I say that if you want to have these plants next year you need to dig them and bring them in, I did have some glads overwinter for a couple of years. But they were mild winters and eventually I did lose them. Anyway, all of these plants should be dug after a frost has browned the foliage. A day or two after the frost occurs, dig up the entire plant and then place it in a shady well ventilated area, like a garage or tool shed, to dry down for a week or two. Spread them out to get good drying - don't just stack them up. Once they are well dried down, cut off the above ground portion of the plant, carefully remove excess dried soil. Once you have them all cleaned up you will want to pack them into something like peat moss, vermiculite or perlite. Don't let the bulbs touch each other. If one starts to decay you don't want it touching others and spreading. You can also dust the bulbs before storing for added protection. Caladiums are tender and should be stored between 50 and 60 degrees. All the other bulbs are best stored around 40 degrees if possible. An unheated garage may work if they are well packed! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.