

Pine Sawfly

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I received my first call last week. Someone noticed these funny looking dark green worms on their pine tree. While generally found on Mugo pines, they can also be on Scots pines, if there are any left, or just about any of the short needled pines. These generally dark green worms with nearly black head capsules will be on the ends of the branches and there is rarely just one, there are a bunch. When disturbed they will frequently all exhibit a jerky motion in uniform. This is a defensive gesture which is designed to make them look like one much larger organism so predators will be less likely to attack them. These critters are the European Pine Sawfly. While the worms may look like caterpillars, the adult is not a butterfly or moth. It also isn't a fly but is one of the non-stinging members of the bee and wasp order. Eggs were laid last fall in the needles and hatch out sometime in April. When they first emerge they will just eat the surfaces off the leaves resulting in what looks like dried up needles that have curled up. As the larvae grow they will start to devour the entire needle and a heavy population can just about strip a pine clean in a few weeks. Fortunately homeowners don't need to worry if this happens. The new growth candles aren't out yet and while the plant may look like a freshly trimmed poodle for a year or two, it will survive. There is one generation per year and most of them should have hatched by now. They are easily controlled by just about any lawn and garden insecticide labeled for controlling pests on pines. Spray the entire shrub or tree to control them. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Garden Calendar

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Where has April gone? It's been flying by like crazy and the garden calendar is about to get away from us!. While we aren't QUITE ready for tomatoes, etc., unless you want to live on the edge with a few plants, we are getting close. By the end of April you need to be shutting down the planting of our cool weather crops - things like cabbage, and all it's kin, and potatoes, peas and many of the leafy crops. If wet weather has delayed you, you can still try to get them in but be advised that mother nature may work against you if it turns off abnormally warm all of a sudden. But fear not, we have a whole host of things that we can be planting. Collards, Swiss chard, carrots, melons - by seed, lettuce, beets, even sweet corn can be going in the ground now. Of course you need to be able to get these in the ground without creating a muddy mess. April's been wet and while I hate to complain about too much rain, I would really like ten days of drying weather - just sayin! For all of those crops that you already have in the ground and hopefully are growing, the afore mentioned rain may very well have caused a lot of the nitrogen to be lost from the soil so a little side dressing of nitrogen fertilizer along side of the row could be very helpful for your crops. Now, what I'm going to tell you next is on the assumption that you PROMISE not to jump the gun. By the end of NEXT week, and that's Friday evening or Saturday, not Monday, you can start planting your beans, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, summer squash (that's zucchini) and yes, peppers and tomatoes. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Tree Trimming Scam

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I received a call recently from a local individual who had a friend that had been approached by a "Tree Trimming Service" who told the homeowner that the tree in their back yard was at risk of falling on their house and gave them a bid of several thousand dollars, easily double to triple what a legitimate firm would charge. So let's just get this straight - if someone shows up on your doorstep, unsolicited, saying you have trees that need to be removed, ask them to leave. Reputable tree trimmers, or roofers or inset business here, don't go door to door peddling what they can do. There's enough business that comes to them, they don't have to resort to that. When you do need tree trimming done, and I mean proper tree trimming, not topping and butchering, then you want to employ someone who is a certified by the Kansas Arborists Association. These people have been through training and testing and have shown that they know the right way to trim trees. Get bids from at least two different certified arborists. There will be some differences but there shouldn't be a two or three fold difference in prices. Ask for referral or previous customers, ask to see their business license and a certificate of insurance. These are all items that a legitimate business will be happy to provide. Once you get a bid, let them know you will get back with them and call their references or call me. While I won't recommend one over another, I can at least tell you if the business has been around the area for awhile or steer you clear of something that sounds shall we say, shady!

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Poison Ivy

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I saw my first poison ivy buds of spring the other day. This isn't something that a lot of people look forward to or generally even notice, but if you are sensitive to poison ivy, beware! Part of the problem with poison ivy is that even in the off season, sensitive people can still get a reaction to it. The nasty compound that does the deed is a very stable oil that's in the sap. You have to get the sap on you in some form. It does not volatilize and travel in the air, contrary to what some people think. You have to get the sap on you. The problem is that the sap can become less prominent in the winter but the oil will still be up in the vines and contact with the skin can cause a reaction. Obviously this time of year, with new growth coming on, the sap is going to flow much more easily and contact with the young leaves or the vines is going to bring sap to the surface pretty easily. Part of the confusion with poison ivy is because the plant is genetically quite variable. For the record, we do not have poison sumac in Kansas and poison oak is restricted to a couple of counties in extreme southeast Kansas. All we have is poison ivy but it can be a vine, a ground cover or a free standing shrub. The leaves can be smooth edged or coarsely toothed. The leaves can be light green or dark green, shiny or dull, they can be big or small. The cue is a compound leaf made up of three leaflets and a vine that is covered with aerial rootlets so it looks like a fuzzy rope. If you aren't sure, bring me a photo of it. Then break out the glyphosate or poison ivy killer and carefully get to work on it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Flower Planting Calendar

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Someone was visiting with me recently expressing their displeasure that I was always talking about which vegetables to plant when, but I never talked about flowers! Well, part of the reason is because flowers are a lot simpler in many respects. You basically have frost tender flowers and you have frost hardy flowers. In all reality, we have a fairly short list of cold hardy annuals, and many of them may be perennials if the winter isn't too harsh. So for the short list, we've got bachelor's buttons, California poppy, sunflower, sweet pea, sweet alyssum, bells of Ireland, forget-me-nots, snapdragons, ornamental kale, dusty miller, pinks, stock, phlox and that whole viola family of pansy, violet, viola and Johnny jump-up. A few of these will survive all summer long, but many, like pansies, really start to melt when the weather heats up. Once you get past that short list, everything else is fairly tender. As such you should probably wait until about the first week of May, meaning next week, and for a few, like ornamental sweet potato vine or ornamental peppers, you really want to wait until the last half of May before you start planting. While we are past the average last frost date of April 15th, we generally feel that our frost free date is around May 10th. So if you are in a hurry to get your begonias and impatiens and other very frost sensitive flowers planted, you just need to really back off a little bit. You can plant in pots now, so you can bring them in if it gets cold OR you can clear off and possibly till up your flower beds to help them start to warm up, but just be patient! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.