

Gardening with Chuck for August 28 - September 3, 2017

Give those cool season grasses a boost

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We're on the cusp of September which means cool season grasses are getting ready to shift gears for the next few months. Cool season grasses, like fescue and bluegrass, do some very serious growing in the fall. Unlike spring when all that growth seems to be UP, requiring lots of mowing to keep up with those seed stalks, a lot of the fall growth is in the roots and crowns. This is the time of year that we can really build and develop those plants for good early season growth and a thicker lawn. Much of this growth occurs without the rapid growth of leaves and certainly no seed stalks at this time of year. To encourage good growth homeowners need to make sure that their lawns have adequate food resources available and the easiest way to do that is with a couple of fertilizations. The key element here is nitrogen, however if you've been fertilizing and haven't been seeing good results in recent years there is likely something else missing and that is phosphorus. If you've been applying your lawn fertilizer and getting good results, continue what you've been doing. But if you haven't been getting good results, a soil test is in order. For optimum lawn results, fertilize in early September with 1 to 1½ pounds of nitrogen. Most lawn fertilizers have spreader settings that will apply this much when directions are followed. This is usually a fast release fertilizer so the lawn gets a good kick. This is a straight fertilizer, no weed control. A second application is done in late October and this can usually include a weed and feed product for weed control. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dead lilac canes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It isn't uncommon in late summer to notice dead canes in your lilacs and even in your privet hedges. The culprit here is ash-lilac borer. Last spring, usually May or June, a small wasp looking moth laid eggs at the base of the plants and the small larvae crawled up a little ways on the plant and burrowed into the lilac stems. There it has been all summer long just feeding away slowly eating through all those vessels and tissue that carry food and nutrients up and down in the plant. By the late summer the damage has become sufficient enough that individual canes often die. If you look closely at the base of these canes you can see that sawdust like material called frass has been pushed out of a hole at the base of the cane. The larvae that did all the damage is pretty well through feeding now and will go through the winter inside these dead canes. It will pupate in the spring and emerge as a wasp looking moth in May and June to start the cycle all over again. At this time there is no insecticide treatment that you can use. Treatments need to be applied next spring in late April and May. If you are finding dead canes in your lilac, mark your calendar for the very end of April to treat them next spring. In the meantime, over the next few weeks, go ahead and start to remove these dead canes as you find them. Cut them off at ground level and put the entire thing in a burn pile, burn barrel or in the trash - just get it out of there. Removing them won't eliminate all of next year's infestations, but it should help reduce the number that you have next year. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dividing Daylilies

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Daylilies are vigorous growers and really need to be divided every three to four years to maintain that vigor. Now, if you don't think you want that vigor, keep in mind that this is what helps them to bloom prolifically through the summer. And if your's aren't blooming prolifically, and you haven't divided them for more than five years, that may very well be the reason why! Daylilies have a root system that is every bit as tough as they are. One of the most valuable tools that you can have to aid in dividing daylilies is a spading fork, and get two of them while you're at it. If it's only been a few years since you divided your daylilies, you may be able to do it in place. Simply dig down with the spading fork and start peeling off fans that you can plant elsewhere until you've reduced the size of the in-place clump. But if it's been way too long since you've divided your daylilies, dig the whole clump up and get it out on top of the ground where you can work on it. Then start inserting the spading forks back to back and start working the clump apart into manageable smaller clumps. Your goal is something the size of a head of cauliflower. An alternate method is to throw the clump on the lawn, get out the garden hose and nozzle and start washing the soil off and rolling the roots around on the lawn until you can separate it with your hands. Once the dividing is done dig holes about 24 to 30 inches apart, mix a little bone meal into the bottom of the hole, replant the divisions and water down good to settle the soil. The number of flowers will be reduced the first year only. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Controlling vines in the landscape

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Late in the season we commonly start to realize that we have a lot of vining plants in the yard and landscape. Sometimes these are seedling poison ivy vines - even as a young plant, the three leaf formation is easily seen. If it's wet, just carefully pull them up. But sometimes the vines are too big. Other times, especially this time of year, we'll find well established vines of honeyvine milkweed which has fragrant clusters of tiny white flowers but no milky sap when you break the stem because it really isn't a true milkweed. These do have milkweed like seed pods later in the season however. There are many other minor vining plants that we'll often find growing in our landscapes and we often don't want them. I personally like honeyvine milkweed because it is very attractive to butterflies. Anyway, control of these plants has to be done with great care since we often need to use herbicides and the plants around the vines are often as sensitive to the herbicides as the vines we are trying to kill. I would avoid the poison ivy killer type of products as they have fumes that can curl leaves of desirable plants. Which means we are often stuck with using glyphosate, a.k.a. Roundup or Kleenup, to control these. But glyphosate is non-selective. If you can pull the vine away from the plants and have bare soil to lay it on you can just spray it with the glyphosate. But more often you may have to resort to leaf by leaf treatment using a small paint brush or a Q-tip. You don't have to treat all the leaves, but get 6 or 12. You can also do a cut stump treatment with full strength glyphosate. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Can I eat those crabapples?

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 I will invariably receive phone calls from folks wanting to know if the little fruits on the flowering crabapples or the ornamental pears are edible. Now, keep in mind that there is a difference between edible, meaning non-poisonous, as opposed to desirable! Both flowering pears and flowering crabapples have fruit that is not poisonous. But the key thing to remember is that these cultivars have been selected for their blooming, not for their fruit quality. The flowering pears have a hard little fruit that basically has no utility other than to be eaten by birds to be spread all over the place. When it comes to the crabapples keep in mind that there are flowering crabapples and then actual fruiting crabapples that are grown for their fruit. If an apple has a fruit that is smaller than 2 inches in diameter, then it is considered a crabapple and if it is over 2 inches it is just an apple. We had a crabapple on the farm that had delightful little yellow skinned fruit and this is what my mom made apple butter out of every year. The flowering crabapples often have a fruit that is quite small. Some of them are quite hard and linger until well into winter when freezing weather has softened them up and then the birds will eat them. It may be a lot of work to do anything with these small crabapples, but you can sample them and see if they have a desirable flavor. But like I said, these trees were selected for their flowering so don't be disappointed if the flavor of the fruit isn't all that great. But feel free to try either the pears or the crabapples. They won't kill you! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.