

Dormant Turfgrass Seeding

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. By the time we get to December we usually feel that we are well into the time frame that we can do dormant seeding without any concern. This year is a bit warmer than normal but I think things have cooled off enough that we can still go ahead. The concept of dormant seeding is to get the seed into the ground when the ground is too cold for the seed to germinate and then it's there and ready to go when the soils slowly start to warm in late winter and early spring. Seed decay organisms are also not working well at those temperatures so we normally won't see much of an issue. Now dormant seeding doesn't mean just throwing seed out on the soil surface. You need to use a power seeder to get that seed into the ground where it's in contact with the soil. Power seeders can be rented from hardware stores and equipment rental stores. There is, however, another form of seeding where you do just broadcast the seed on the soil surface. It first of all requires that it be wet enough that the soil surface is damp. Freezing and thawing creates little pockets on the soil surface that the seed falls into, the soil dries and covers the seed and then you wait for it to warm up. The other option is to wait until we have a couple inches of snow and then you go out, after it's warmed up and starting to melt and broadcast seed on top of the snow. The seed melts a little bit into the snow and as the snow melts it pulls the seed right down to the soil surface and into those same little divets. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Till Gardens and Flowerbeds Now

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One thing that an abnormally dry late fall does is gives us more time to till the soil in gardens and flowerbeds. It doesn't matter whether you are using a rototiller or the time honored tradition of hand spading it, you want to do it when the ground is somewhat dry. But even if your soil is a bit damp, you can work it up now and then all those clods that you might create will have all winter to weather and mellow down and break up. Fall tillage gives you a jump on the spring planting season. Most years soils are cold and wet and take forever to dry out come spring. If you till them up now they are ready to be just raked a little next spring and planted. So if you want to plant peas on March 1st, or earlier, and potatoes on St Patrick's day, you aren't stuck trying to work up that wet soil. Fall tillage is a good time to add lime or sulfur and till it into the ground so it can start working to raise or lower your soil pH. These are slow chemical reactions where the pH amending product has to interact with the soil particles. Test your soil, add what you need to if you need to, till it in and it can start working over the winter. Lastly, fall tillage allows you to incorporate organic matter. Take those leaves or compost or whatever, spread it evenly over the garden and till it in. The microbes will be slow to start working, but they will start working and when it warms up in the late winter so will the decomposition. If you are adding a lot of organic matter, add some nitrogen fertilizer as well to help! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Compost Pile Maintenance

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Fall is a good time to add to or start a compost pile. You've probably got lots of tree leaves on your yard. Put your bagger on your lawn mower. Yes, I really did say to put your bagger on your lawn mower - it's okay this one time - and mow your yard collecting the leaves and what ever remaining grass there is. It's important though that you don't set the mower down low - you need to keep that same height that your lawn was mowed at all year - essentially no lower than 2½ inches. When you empty the bagger empty it into a compost bin or even just a pile in the back corner of the yard or garden - preferably up against a wall or fence so it won't blow around too much. Here's where it gets a little tricky. If this is a new compost pile you need to add a little soil to it. Soil carries the microscopic life forms that break down the organic matter into it's lowest forms. Next, add some nitrogen fertilizer. The microbes use nitrogen as a food source to do their business. Adding nitrogen fertilizer helps speed up the process. The next thing you need to do is slowly soak it with water. The decomposing process needs warmth, moisture and oxygen so don't drown the compost pile, but make it damp. This time of year it is still warm enough that you can get decomposition started. If it's rolling good it will create it's own heat and on cool calm mornings you may see steam coming out of the pile. This is a good thing, it's not catching on fire. Call if you have questions. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Poor Drainage or Excess Drainage

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Yards and gardens can have two very different problems when it comes to water: poor drainage or excess drainage. Poor drainage comes from areas that lie slightly lower than surrounding areas so water accumulates there and sits.

Sometimes it may not sit for long, at least on the surface, but it is always slow to dry out because it is collecting water from the surrounding area. These saturated soils lead to low oxygen levels in the soil and low oxygen level stunt the growth of roots, especially the little crucial hair roots. Then you're also waiting for that spot to dry down so you can till or plant or weed or just about everything. It's very inconvenient. Fall is a good time to work on those areas. You basically have two choices in low spots - drain off the water or build up the soil level. You need to be careful building up the soil level so you don't over do it and create new wet spots. You also need to work that soil in as you go, and lots of organic matter too as these wet spots are often low in organic matter. You want to add soil slowly and work it in because soil water and plant roots don't like to move across abrupt boundaries. By tilling the added soil in with the original soil it creates a mixed zone with a more subtle transition. Even if the soil is from the surrounding area and looks the same, mix it together as differences in soil texture aren't always easily seen. At the end of the day you want to have a garden that is flat enough to eliminate low spots. Tomorrow, excess drainage. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Excess Drainage in landscapes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Sometimes in landscapes we don't have as much problem with poor drainage resulting in standing water - it's excessive drainage where water is moving too fast. Water is the most powerful solvent in the world. Given time it will erode everything. Its very nature is to move soil. It is constantly grabbing at anything it can to carry it "downstream" so to speak. Crystal clear water, running in a stream is an anomaly reserved for areas where there is literally no soil and only rock. Amazingly to some homeowners, you don't even need to have steep slopes to have water moving across your property and causing erosion. But the steeper the slope and the longer the run, the worse the problem will be. Part of the problem that has to be addressed, because you aren't really going to stop water from moving, is to create situations where you are slowing the water down and directing where it runs. I'm not a fan in landscapes of putting moving water into a concrete ditch because it usually only serves to speed it up. You want to slow it down with vegetation, usually a strong stand of grass or into a broad channel with lots of small to medium size rocks, even a meandering channel like that. Anything that will keep water from direct contact with bare soil is certainly going to help. But you need to proceed with good and careful planning so that you don't make a bad problem worse. If you have lack of drainage issues or excess drainage issues, give me a call and I'll come out and visit! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.