

Gardening with Chuck for July 31 - August 6, 2017

August Garden Planting

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 a vegetable garden I hope you don't let the heat of late July or early August keep you out of the garden and curb your willingness to plant more fall garden. For some fall vegetable crops we are at the tail end of the planting time, but if you hurry, and we don't have a late frost, you should still get a crop. This would include one more planting of snap beans. Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower, if you can find transplants, can still be planted. In fact cauliflower can be planted up to the middle of August. Carrots and beets can still be planted for another week or two. Look for carrot varieties that have shorter seasons. Beets are generally a shorter season anyway so less of a problem. And for all you Kale lovers out there - it can be planted through most of the month of August. A general rule of thumb is that the crops that you can plant earliest, you can plant latest in the summer as they are the most cold tolerant. Crops like leaf lettuce, radish, spinach and turnips all need to wait until later in August. We want to get temperatures starting to decline for those crops. If you've ever eaten a really hot radish or turnip, a lot of these characteristics are caused by hot growing conditions. It's probably too late for potatoes - but again, that all depends on how early it gets cold - in recent years we've had very late falls. Because hot soils also dry out very quickly, daily watering may be needed for the first couple of weeks until the seeds germinate and get started. Apply a little starter fertilizer at planting and then a good side dressing of fertilizer about 3 to 4 weeks later. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Renovating Bermudagrass

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Bermudagrass is a warm season turf grass from the south. It greens up late, it goes dormant early, and it needs full sun. It is a tough grass that can take direct sun and hot weather and keep growing. In some settings it is an excellent choice for a lawn grass. But many people don't want it in their lawns and wish to get rid of it. Let me say right now though that if your neighbors also have Bermudagrass, it will constantly be trying to spread from their lawns into yours so it might be a losing battle. Bermudagrass can really only be killed by treating it with the herbicide glyphosate. You need to start now because you want to make sure that the Bermudagrass is growing good and then spray it with the glyphosate. Wait ten days, water it, mow it low and treat it again. Some homeowners will do this three times to try to get as good a kill as possible. Then mow it very low again and prepare to seed into the existing dead grass with a power seeder. You could try to till it up before seeding, but I'll tell you right now that tilling up recently killed Bermudagrass sod is nasty work. You're better off to use a power seeder, plant into it and just let the old sod breakdown. You may want to add some extra nitrogen to the soil to help get the old root system breaking down. Especially when seeding into a killed Bermuda sod, plan on watering regularly to get that new grass seed up and growing as soon as possible. If you do have a sprig or two of Bermudagrass that comes back, you can use the product called Bermudagrass control for lawns which will not hurt the new stand of bluegrass or fescue. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Prepping for Lawn Planting

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Late summer is generally considered THE time to plant cool season lawn grasses like bluegrass or tall fescue. I'll tighten that time frame up just a little bit more and say that the first three weeks of September is the sweet spot. By planting grass seed then, the soil is still warm so you get good germination. The temperatures are starting to cool off so the grass will grow better and it gives you enough time to get the lawn well established before colder temperatures pretty much shut down growth for the winter. If you want to do some seeding or even overseeding, this gives you the month of August to get all prepped to plant. The biggest failures in lawn seeding come from three principle sources: failure to get the seed into the soil, failure to raise the soil pH if it is acidic and failure to have adequate levels of phosphorus. The second and third issues are easily tackled with a soil test now. Bring a pint of soil made from samples taken in several parts of your yard in to the Extension Office and we'll get it analyzed to see if lime or starter fertilizer are needed. Especially if lime is needed, to correct acidic soil conditions, it needs to be applied and worked into the soil prior to planting. You can apply phosphorus fertilizer at that time also, or at planting time, or both! As far as seed placement, you either need to apply seed to tilled soil and then rake it into the soil to cover it up OR use one of the power seeders that will slice and put the seed right into the soil through standing cover. The power seeders work for a new seeding or for overseeding lawns that are thin. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Wilting Plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When people get hot, they sweat. It's how our bodies try to keep cool. Plants can't sweat. But they do have processes that they use to survive some of the super hot weather that we have been experiencing lately. Grass plants will roll their leaves up in the heat of the day. This slows down how fast water is passed through the microscopic holes in the leaves known as stomata. The passing of water through the leaf is crucial for photosynthesis. Broadleaf plants don't curl leaves, but they have the ability to shut down those stomata thereby reducing the movement of water through the plant. When plants shut down their stomata, they can't maintain the water pressure, if you will, that keeps the leaf somewhat stiff. The resulting droopy leaves are what we often call wilt. It is a hot weather survival technique. Now, there are other things, including disease and lack of water in the root zone, that can also cause plants to wilt. When many homeowners see a wilting plant they immediately think that the plant needs water. In reality, a plant can be sitting in ideal soil moisture conditions and still wilt because of hot weather, like we have been seeing. The best way to tell if plant is dry is to go out first thing in the morning. If the plant looks normal, then it likely doesn't have disease and isn't excessively dry. If it is wilting, first thing in the morning, then it may be dry OR it may have some disease, like bacterial wilt in vine crops. Give the plant a good soaking that day. If it is dry it'll be fine the next morning. If it's still wilted though, there's a problem. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Walnut Caterpillars

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I had a photo sent to me recently of a weird growth on the side of a tree. The weird growth wasn't actually part of the tree, but rather it was a mass of shed skins of walnut caterpillars. Walnut caterpillars are a brownish to brick red hairy caterpillar that turns into a rather non-descript moth - as many of these hairy caterpillars do.

Walnut caterpillars feed on walnut trees, of course, as well as hickory and pecan, but they will feed on many other species of trees. These were feeding on an ash tree. Walnut caterpillars are gregarious - they feed in large groups. There are two generations per year. The first generation has finished feeding by now. When they are ready to pupate they will move down the tree, shed their skins and leave them on the side of the tree, in the big ugly mass that the home owner was seeing, and then drop to the ground to pupate. The second generation, while likely not large yet, is already feeding in trees. When they are through feeding they will do the same thing and leave more nasty looking clumps of dead skins on the sides of the trees. These clumps of skins and webbing they leave behind can be scraped off by hand or with a rake or hoe or almost anything.

Feeding can be significant with second generation but unless you're worried about nut production, it likely won't hurt the overall health of the tree. Large trees can be rather impractical to spray, but smaller trees are doable. Since they feed in clusters you don't need to spray the entire tree. Spinosad, permethrin and cyfluthrin are probably the best products to use for control. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.