

Gardening with Chuck for March 27 - April 2, 2017

Gardening Season has finally arrived

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I totally can not believe I didn't talk about this last week! Spring gardening season is finally upon us in all it's glory! Obviously we can't plant tomatoes and some of those other heat loving plants yet, but we can really start to gear up as mother nature allows us! Obviously you don't want to work wet ground so all the following goes with the assumption that the garden is ready to go, or that it hasn't rained significantly between the time that I recorded this and you hear it, which is always a risk at this time of year! So it's the end of March. The soil is still a little bit on the cool side. This time of year soil temperatures are a roller coaster. We get two days of sunshine and warm temps and the soil temps creep up. Then we get two days of cooler weather and clouds and the temperatures drop back down. But in the long run they are trending up. Right now they are hovering around 50 degrees so we are crossing that threshold. As we are in the very end of March and heading into April there's quite a bit we can be planting. All of the cole crops which are plants like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and Brussel sprouts can be planted now through about the middle of April. These are plants that aren't going to be bothered by some cool frosty mornings if we still have any. Additionally you can be planting leafy crops lettuce and spinach or root crops like radishes, turnips, beets even onions, either plants or sets. And of course potatoes and peas can be planted anytime through about April 20th. In a couple more weeks you can add collards, chard and carrots to the list! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Shady Turf

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One of the biggest challenges that homeowners face is getting grass to grow in shady areas. For the sake of grass and this discussion, shady areas are any places in your yard that receive less than four hours of direct sunlight every day in the middle of summer. Grass is a plant of the sunshine and it needs sunshine to thrive. If you have areas of your lawn that every fall or spring you are overseeding because they are thin, then you probably have a shade issue. In these areas grass will come up fine because in the fall or spring, there is plenty of sunshine. The grass germinates, has plenty of sunshine and starts out looking good. But as the summer comes on, the tree leaves come out, the light intensity wanes and the grass stand starts to thin out, looking more and more like the top of my head. We normally recommend tall fescue for our yards because it can take some shade. If you have any shade you don't want to plant bluegrass at all and forget the warm season grasses, they need even more sunshine. But if you get into areas that even tall fescue doesn't like, then you have limited options. I've found groundcovers, like English ivy or periwinkle, sometimes called vinca minor work well. If you are determined to plant grass then you will need to try some of the true fine leaf fescues. This includes things like hard, creeping red or chewing's fescues. Don't try perennial rye, it's no better than bluegrass. There are many fine fescues to try though most are just a blend, often called shady area. But, while these have good shade tolerance, they have poor heat tolerance. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Henbit

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. To all you rock and rollers, Purple Haze probably has a different meaning than it does to homeowners and county agents. Henbit is one of our winter annual weeds that hit full bloom last week. I have to admit that from an aesthetics point of view, I really like the plant. I've even been known to refer to it as K-State weed. But if you've got it in your lawn to the point that it's been a purple haze in recent weeks, you probably aren't happy and it does indicate a problem. Oh, the henbit isn't the problem, but rather a symptom of the problem. Henbit starts growing in the fall. It is small then and easily killed. It starts growing where there is seed and sunlight hitting the soil surface. You aren't likely to find it in a thick lawn that is mowed tall. So the problem is that you have thin turf and it is probably mowed too low as well. That is what you are going to work on from now until next fall. The henbit is in full bloom and will continue to bloom and set seed over the next few weeks. In another 4 to 6 weeks even if you don't do anything, it will start to die and by the end of May or middle of June, it will be nothing but a dried up memory. Since the plant is now at a mature size, it is much harder to kill. You can kill it with proper use of homeowner lawn herbicides but be forewarned that even as it is dying it will produce seed that will sprout this fall. Start mowing your lawn taller. Take steps now and in the fall to thicken the stand of grass. These are all things that will reduce the henbit that starts growing this fall. But then in early November also be ready to treat your yard for henbit! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What's that tree?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The conversation, either over the phone or in person, usually goes something like this. "Hey, Chuck, can you tell me what the tree is that's blooming at 6th and Jackson right now....." Welcome to the psychic plant identification hotline! If I'm lucky, I've been by that location recently and I noticed what was blooming. But if I haven't, I've got nothing to help you with. If you really want to know what a tree is, bring me a picture of it on your phone or a branch tip with blossoms or leaves. If it's one of the nearly pure white blooming trees that you are seeing all over town right now, however, I can tell you that what you are seeing is an ornamental pear or Callery pear. The best known one of these is the Bradford Pear, although there are several other cultivars commonly grown today. Please don't plant one! They are beautiful right now and they are quickly becoming a horrible weed. The short version is that when they first came out they were fruitless. But when new cultivars came out they were able to cross pollinate with the Bradfords and now all of them are liable to be loaded with small useless fruit. Well, they are useless to us, but the birds love them and therein lies the problem. The birds spread the seeds everywhere and now they are becoming a weed! If you want a beautiful blooming tree plant a flowering crabapple. We have many many varieties of flowering crabs, they too can have fruit for the birds but unlike the pears, flowering crabs are much less prone to sprouting and growing. We have a good bulletin on flowering crabs, so please pick up a copy! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Onion Confusion

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Onions are awesome and relatively easy to grow. We plant onion sets, which are often poorly identified to variety to grow green onions. Often times these are multiplier onions which work well because they do a poor job of developing a bulb. But for storage onions or cooking onions you want a large onion. Onions bulb in response to daylength and are either short day, intermediate day or long day plants. Intermediate day onions are best suited for Kansas conditions and will give you the biggest bulb. If you want to grow really big onions, look for varieties like Candy, Red Candy Apple or Super Star. Others to consider include yellow varieties like Yellow Globe and Early Globe (pungent flavor but good keepers), or improved mild-flavored types such as Fiesta, Texas 1015 Y, Grano, and Granex. Mildest flavored onions are the bermuda types--Yellow or White Bermuda. You can grow your own plants from seed but it's too late for this year. Onions have shallow root systems and need good even moisture and regular fertilization. Work a basic application of 12-12-12, or similar fertilizer into the ground before planting at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet. When the onions have been growing for about 3 weeks, fertilize with a nitrogen fertilizer like nitrate of soda 16-0-0 or ammonium sulfate, 21-0-0 at 4 cups per 100 feet of row. Keep the plants well watered, about once a week if it doesn't rain. Keep them weeded, being careful not to disturb the root system, or consider using a garden weed preventer at planting time. Harvest around July 1. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.