

### Time to stop planting grass

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Even though the ground is warm and we are continuing to see above normal temperatures, for the most part, we need to stop planting grass seed. Grass seed needs to get enough growth in the fall so that it has a well developed root system. A lot of people think that it needs to get big enough so that it doesn't freeze out. But the problem isn't with the temperatures that we have in the winter. Even quite small grass plants can handle very cold temperatures. What can happen though is that if we get into a cycle of lots of freezing and thawing, small grass plants that don't have a good root system, will get frost heaved out of the ground. If that small little plant with a small little crown right below the soil line get's pushed up into the air. It will dry out and then the plant will be dead. It didn't freeze to death, it dried out to death. Active spring seeding can start up in late March and continue through early May. An option, once the ground cools off a bit more, is to do a dormant seeding. Once soil temperatures get down below 50 degrees, the rate of germination is so slow that the grass seed won't really germinate until late winter or very early spring. As of about a week ago, the soil temperatures were still running in the upper 50s to low 60s so we're probably still 3 to 4 weeks off from being able to do a dormant seeding. If you absolutely HAVE to get some grass seed planted to get some cover established, get out there NOW and plant perennial ryegrass. Perennial rye comes up very quick but tends to be short lived in hot dry weather so overseeding later must be done. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Miscellaneous Insect Issues

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I have a wooden trough on the ground in my backyard that I feed birds out of. With a recent rain I had to turn it over to drain out the rainwater. Under this hollowed out 4 x 4 there were some surface tunnels and through one of them was crawling a large white grub that I immediately realized was the grub of one of those big green June beetles. Green June beetle grubs are big, as I said, and we're talking as big or bigger than your little finger, and they have one trait that makes them easy to identify. The grub crawls along on it's back. It's feet are in the air and it's just moving along. Rather odd. Green June beetle grubs are far more likely to be seen out crawling on sidewalks and driveways following big rains this time of year. Unlike other June beetle grubs, these are of little risk to your lawn as they prefer to feed on thatch and other organic matter, not the roots of grass like the southern masked chafers. So while rather disgusting, they aren't worth worrying about. A couple of things I'm seeing far fewer of this year than last year are the Asian multi-colored lady beetles and boxelder bugs, or what most people call democrats. I'm not sure why box elder bug numbers are lower, and maybe it's still just early, but I haven't see nearly as many around the outsides of buildings yet this fall. I do have a pretty good idea though why the lady beetle numbers are down. Last year we had very high numbers of sugar cane aphids providing lots of food for lots of lady beetles. This year we had few aphids. Less food equals less things for them to eat, hence fewer lady beetles! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Why Till Your Garden in the Fall

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I really encourage gardeners to till their garden in the fall and yes, I really do have several good reasons for this. I just tilled my garden the end of last week. But the reason I tilled mine is because I wanted to plant my garlic the next day, which I did. Right now the soil is working up really well. Unless you've been flooding your garden, the recent rains earlier this month really have it in a good soil moisture condition. It's tilling up very nicely, or at least mine did. If you till the garden in the fall, and you're not planting garlic, that means that you are all ready for next year. And truth be told I did not till the entire garden, just enough area for my garlic - I'll get the rest of it done in the next couple of weeks. If you want to plant early season crops, like peas especially, but potatoes as well, we can sometimes get in a bind because the ground can be wet in the spring and take quite a while to dry out which results in you getting a late start. But there are more reasons than just that! Fall tillage can bury left over plant debris allowing it to start breaking down and hopefully killing off any diseases on the plant remains -which doesn't work for tomato vines which is why you remove them from the garden. Several insects also overwinter as eggs so fall tillage busts up those egg cases causing higher mortality and hope for fewer insects. Finally, fall gives you a great opportunity to till in organic matter to help deal with this clay we have. If you need to add lime or sulfur to modify soil pH, it's the perfect time for that or to add some fertilizer, all to give you a jump, on next years garden! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Late Harvesting of Sweet Potatoes

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 sweet potatoes in your garden and you haven't harvested them yet, and they are still actively growing, it looks like the end is probably near based on current forecasts. We've had a good long run this year for sweet potatoes. Unlike Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes don't start to lose quality when they get large and the longer you leave them in the ground the larger they will get. They also love heat so the past couple of weeks have really been to their liking. But the one thing that sweet potatoes do not like is cold weather. You can start digging them any time, and in all reality, you probably should. One frost isn't a problem for sweet potatoes but the second frost can be. Sweet potato roots are very sensitive to cold weather. If you have just a few sweet potatoes you can wait until that first frost. But if you have a lot of plants, you'd better get digging NOW. When you dig them you want to cure them for several days in warm humid conditions. 85 to 90 degrees is ideal and the higher the humidity the better. When the roots are first dug the skin can be very tender and any bumps or abrasions can break the skin and open it up to decay. Curing them for 5 to 10 days allows that skin to toughen up. The curing process also helps to start converting starches to sugars which is what you want in a SWEET potato. The other thing to keep in mind is that the sensitivity to cold temperatures carries forward to the root after harvest as well. Store sweet potatoes above 55 degrees. In fact, room temperature in your house is fine! Basements can work too if they aren't cold. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Winter Storage of Summer Bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It would appear that we are finally nigh onto seriously freezing temperatures. While scattered frosts have been reported we've yet to have an area wide freeze, which appears to be about to occur. The first freezes of fall are a signal that we have to get some plants out of the ground and into milder conditions if we want to have them around next year. While we often refer to these as summer flowering bulbs, they are more correctly anything from bulbs to rhizomes, tubers, corms or a tuberous rooted plants. Regardless, unless you want to buy all new next year, get ready to start digging. Once a freeze has at least partially browned the foliage, dig them up and allow them to dry for about a week or two in a garage or shed. Spread them out so they can dry down. Clean off the excess plant parts, that have dried up as well as any dried up dirt that may have come along. As you go through this cleaning process you will eventually get to something that should look like what you planted. When you get to the storable parts, you will want to pack them in a box with peat moss, vermiculite or perlite. You don't want any bulb touching another bulb. If rot starts in one it will move to others if they are touching. You can dust them with a general garden fungicide to reduce the risk of storage rots. Caladiums need to be stored above 60 degrees, all the others are fine around 40. An attached garage often works well, or a basement against a cool concrete wall with some insulation, like an old blanket, to help keep them as cool as possible. But just don't forget about them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.