

Forcing Bulbs

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 in gardening is to determine a time line so you can get things done on time. Someone contacted me earlier this month and wanted to know about fall gardening so they could get some things planted.

Unfortunately, fall gardening has to be started in mid to late summer! One thing that people will think about, oh sometime in January, is forcing some bulbs to have some mid winter blooms in their house. The problem is that if you are forcing bulbs you need to really start several months in advance, depending on what species you want to force. For most species they need 10 to 16 weeks of cold treatment before you can bring them in to room temperature and start growing them. Then you'll need another 4 to 6 weeks of growth to have them blooming at the time that you want them in bloom. Which means, that with the exception of paper white narcissus, if you're looking at getting pots blooming about early February you need to start now. Which for many people will work just fine. What you need to do right now though is get out and get your bulbs purchased, make sure you have plenty of potting soil and then either buy some new pots or get some extras cleaned up and sanitized so you can start planting soon. The details of getting the bulbs potted and starting through the process is too complicated to even start in a two minute radio program. We have an excellent bulletin with great details on how to do this so either look it up on line search for forcing bulbs, K-state research and extension, or drop by the office and get a copy! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Poinsettias

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Every winter after the Christmas holiday a lot of people call me up and ask about how to take care of their poinsettia. They want to try to keep it around until the following year and then try to make it rebloom. Okay, all of those of you that asked me how to keep that poinsettia alive, how many of you succeeded? Just like I was talking about yesterday and the need to plan way ahead to force bulbs and have them blooming, you have to plan way ahead to get your poinsettias to rebloom. In fact I'm probably about a week late on this but we should still be okay. The key to making a poinsettia develop those colorful bracts and bloom is darkness. Specifically, it needs 14 hours of uninterrupted darkness at night followed by bright light during the day. Obviously you've got to have a bright window to put the poinsettia by during the day, but the 14 hours of uninterrupted darkness may be a challenge. The best way to do this is simply to get a large cardboard box big enough to fully cover the plant. Then to make sure that no light is creeping in through cracks in the box, line it with aluminum foil. To coincide with most folks work day, the general recommendation is to cover it at 5:30 each evening and uncover it at 7:30 each morning. It will also help if the night time temperature is between 60 and 65 degrees. Warmer than this will delay bud development and bract color development. Once the bracts are showing full color you can stop the dark treatment and just go back to treating it like normal. Now that I've explained the process, do you understand why I say pitch it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Letting Turf Grow Tall 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. Sometimes homeowners get the notion, from someone, that they need to quit mowing their lawn in the fall and just let it grow tall and flop over. I think this idea comes from the concept that we are going to let the plant have those long leaves to carry on photosynthesis so it'll produce a lot of food for the root system and then the tall leaves will provide insulation for the crown of the plant from cold winter temperatures. Well, if you want to graze cattle on your lawn in December then this is fine and we often do it with tall fescue and call it stockpiling forage. But I really doubt that many of you are going to graze cattle or even sheep on your lawn in December. What happens in reality is that the tall grass does flop over and gets matted down to the point that with heavy or extended snowfall or even really wet weather, those long leaf blades become a matted tangled mess that can lead to disease problems or worse yet, suffocation of plants. Tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass have very good cold tolerance. They don't need the extra cover. Any extra roots developed in the fall are likely going to be lost over winter. You're better off to just keep mowing the grass at the same height all year from the first mowing in the spring to the last mowing in the fall. By keeping the leaf blades the same length the grass plant can more easily bring the roots into a constant balance with the leaves. Tall fescue needs to be mowed 2.5 to 3.5 inches tall. Bluegrass from 2 to 3 inches tall. If you want to make the last mowing a little shorter, that's fine, just don't go below the minimum. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Why those fall fertilizations are so important

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Warm season turf grasses things like

Buffalograss, Bermudagrass and Zoysia are going dormant right now. They do not need, in fact they shouldn't be fertilized in the fall. All you are doing is encouraging weeds and cool season

grasses that you may not want in the lawn. However, fall fertilization is crucial for those cool season grasses like tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. Cool season grasses do most of their

growth in the spring and the fall when we have cooler temperatures. In the spring they are all about putting up a seed stalk and producing seed. In the fall they are all about developing a

more vigorous root system and more tillers. Interpret more tillers as a thicker stand of grass.

Heavy fertilization in the spring will cause grass to grow more and you'll have to mow more.

Heavy fertilization in the fall will stimulate more growth, but more of that growth will be

directed at the underground portions of the plant. Ironically, lawns that are well fertilized in the fall will green up sooner and be a deeper green than lawns fertilized heavy in the spring. For

moderate to heavily managed lawns I recommend two fall fertilizations, one in early September and another in mid to late October. If you only want to fertilize once in the fall, do it in mid to

late October. Now, don't waste money on a fertilizer called a winterizer. What your lawn needs both times is a good shot of nitrogen. Use a standard lawn fertilizer, like a 27-3-3 in September.

Then in October use a weed and feed product. Why the weed and feed in October will be what I discuss tomorrow! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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Why We Control Weeds When We Do

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Weed and feed lawn fertilizers are designed to give the lawn a shot of fertilizer and apply weed control. Now, if you have a full thick lawn and can't see any little weeds coming along, don't treat at all or spot treat with liquid herbicides. But why do I emphasize treating weeds in the fall? Most of the weeds that drive homeowners crazy are the ones that bloom in the early spring. We can sum this up with the big four - dandelions, henbit, speedwell and chickweed. If these little flowers in your yard don't bother you, don't treat them. In fact dandelions and henbit are very good early season nectar and pollen sources for bees. Okay, that aside, all four of these will be actively growing in the mid fall, mainly the latter half of October. Dandelions are a perennial that will come up anytime during the growing season. The other three are annuals and the seeds are germinating and growing now, especially since we got cooler weather and some rain. These weeds are small in the fall, they are easy to control. You treat them, they slowly just disappear and in the spring you aren't going crazy about all those flowers! Additionally, in the fall, all those plants with sensitive foliage, are going dormant so they aren't easily bothered by any vapors or drift coming off the herbicide application. In the spring those plants have young delicate leaves that curl when you show them a picture of weed killer. So treat in the fall when you don't have those worries. And like I said earlier, if the flowers don't bother you, leave them for the bees and the early flying butterflies. And maybe a rabbit or two! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.