

### Is Leaf Drop Early?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I was looking in my backyard the other evening and couldn't help but notice that I needed to either mow the lawn or rake it because my hackberry was dropping leaves like crazy. I've noticed this elsewhere around town and cottonwoods seem to be developing a lot of yellow leaves already as well. It may seem early, but it's nothing to worry about. With the warmer temperatures and lack of rainfall, trees have just decided that it's time to shut down and shed the leaves. It's a coping mechanism that helps them survive periods of drought and or heat stress. At the rate we're going the die is already cast and even if we do start to get good rainfalls in the weeks ahead those abscission layers have already been developed by the leaves so the change will continue. It's nothing to worry about at all! So what does this mean for potential fall leaf color? It could actually be helpful. We had good growing conditions early in the year. Now we are getting some of what we really need for maximum color development - warm sunny days and cool crisp nights. Once that abscission layer forms in the leaf petiole, essentially shutting down the flow of nutrients to and from the leaf, the chlorophyll starts to break down. Chlorophyll is where photosynthesis happens in the leaf and it's what makes a leaf green. But that green also masks all the other colors which have actually been there all summer. So we want the chlorophyll to go away and leave those red and yellow and orange hues that make for spectacular fall foliage. And you know what? Color is already showing up! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Dust It In and Pray for Rain

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We're down to just a few weeks of time left in that ideal window for planting grass seed in our lawns. Some people planted grass seed several weeks ago and are just waiting for it to rain. My recommendation is to not wait for it to rain. If you planted grass seed and it has not emerged after two weeks, start getting the water to it. We want to get these seeds germinating and then get them well established before it turns off cold. I've seen these nice warm falls turn cool really fast, leaving us only half way ready. We don't want to do that. When a seed of any kind starts to germinate, it must have a continuous soil moisture source to keep growing. If it starts to germinate and then dries out, it is dead. Period. It can't go dormant and wait for more moisture. The grass seed isn't that deep in the soil. Probably less than an inch. So we don't need to apply a lot of irrigation water, probably only about a quarter of an inch. But we need to keep the area moist so you may have to water morning and evening. This is a completely different situation than watering established grass in the summer so don't even think about that. Get the two inch soil profile moist and keep it moist. Soil temperatures are warm so germination should be going well within 7 to 10 days. Once you get a good stand of little green sprigs up and growing you can drop back to watering less often but deeper. We want to get a deeper moist soil profile to encourage deeper root development. Roots only grow where there's moisture. You can water every other day and then every third day and so on. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Water Landscape Plants

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 challenges with my radio programs is that I generally record them late in the week prior to when you hear them. So any time I'm talking about the weather, there is a risk that things will have changed! What hasn't changed is that once we got past the first week of August, the area got dry. It wasn't scorching hot in August, but there still wasn't any rain clear up through the end of last week. For a lot of plants in the landscape this can spell trouble. Many tree and shrub species are shallow rooted. Think 90% of their roots in the top two feet of soil. Evergreens are some of the worst since they don't wilt to show us that they are dry. We don't know until 6 weeks to 6 months later when the needles start to turn brown. When we get into dry spells that go longer than 2 or 3 weeks, any time of the year, we need to be watering those trees. Now I don't mean stand there with a hose and spritz it, I mean put an open hose running slow underneath a tree and let it run for 2 to 4 hours depending on the size and age of the tree. All landscape plants that have been in the ground for less than five years need this attention. Whether it is containerized or ball and burlapped or even spaded in, those trees, and larger landscape trees are more critical, have a limited root system and that root system does not grow as fast as many homeowners think they do. Watering them once a week or every other week is in order until their leaves fall. Then give them one more good general soaking before winter. If you have a sprinkler system, keep in mind that it may not be enough. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Harvesting 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. On days when we are still having temperatures in the 80s and pushing 90, it's hard to realize that frosty weather could easily be just a few weeks away. While many of us may be wishing for those frosty mornings, you need to keep one eye on the forecast if you have sweet potatoes in the ground. 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. Once weather starts cooling down you need to get them out of the ground. 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 a few sweet potatoes you can wait until that first frost. But if you have a lot of plants, you'd better not wait that long. 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. Room temperature in your house is fine! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Insect Population Explosions

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When I judge 4-H entomology exhibits at county fairs, one of the things that I tell the 4-Hers is to decide right then, during July, if they are taking the project again. If they say yes, then I tell them to start collecting because August and September is the "sweet" time for insect collecting. While a few species of insects are early season creatures only, most insects show an increase in the population as we go through the year. By the time we get to mid September, some species may be in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> or even 4<sup>th</sup> generation for the year. Most times each generation has more individuals than the previous. So there becomes lots of opportunity. We see this in our yards and our gardens. More and more butterflies, squash bugs, cicadas, katydids, you name it - both beneficial and damaging insects alike. There is also a very simple fact of nature that as food sources increase, so do the creatures that feed on that food source. Late summer/early fall is also spider time and it's crunch time. These creatures know that cold weather is coming. Huge spiders appear in our yards and gardens, growing fat on the insects around. These spiders are not interested in coming into our homes, but they are interested in developing a large egg case and then placing it someplace where the next generation will survive the winter as an egg. Some insects, like crickets most noticeably, but also lady beetles and box elder bugs WILL try to get into your home to overwinter. Keeping the house sealed up is the first step in keeping these rascals out. After that then you can use perimeter treatments. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.