

Gardening with Chuck for September 25 - October 1, 2017

Moles

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. About 8 or 9 years ago my discussions with homeowners went from theoretical to personal. That was about the time that I had my first mole invade my yard. It's been an on again off again battle ever since, and I'm not winning! Moles are an insectivore. They swim shallowly through the soil and when their very sensitive nose touches anything that moves, they bite it and eat it. This is exactly why poisons and baits are usually quite in-effective. The baits just lay there in the tunnel and don't respond when they are touched. The moles ignore the bait because it doesn't move. Moles don't eat plant roots. They may leave air pockets next to roots which allows roots to dry out and die, but the moles didn't eat them. Moles don't really hibernate but they do go deeper and slow way down in the winter. With as dry as it has been through much of August and September, moles were concentrating their activity where they could find moist soil. Every time I watered my flower bed I had new mole activity. I'd spend time standing quietly with a shovel waiting to see him move, but never did see him so I could attack him. Some people have had luck flooding tunnels. All that did for me was to raise my water bill. The most effective way to deal with moles is to trap them and the grabber traps with the strong spring loaded jaws is probably the easiest to set and most effective. But you have to stay on it and keep moving it nearly every day until you find that active tunnel. Or, you can take the pacifist approach as I have. You stomp down the new tunnels every day and let it go at that. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Lady Beetles

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I haven't heard from anyone calling me to complain about ladybugs swarming into their house. But it is still early yet! This is the time that we usually see this phenomenon and the culprit is one particular species of lady beetle, the multicolored Asian Lady beetle. While they can be several different shades, including greenish and orangish, they always have white cheeks when you get head to head with them. This particular species obviously is not native to North America, not with a name like that. They were intentionally brought here by the USDA to deal with aphid outbreaks in the 1970s in the midwest and east, although there was apparently an accidental introduction from insects on a freighter that docked in New Orleans. Regardless we've got them now. They are extremely efficient at eating aphids. There is no doubt about that. Like most insects that feed on other insects, when there is an abundant food source there are a lot of things to eat that food source. Last year we had a very bad ladybug invasion season. Last year we had a lot of sugarcane aphids throughout Kansas and here locally. Coincidence? No, they were correlated. For any number of reasons we have had very few sugarcane aphids in Kansas this year. As in I may have seen 2 sugarcane aphids at the most. Without an abundant food source I think we'll have fewer problems this year. There'll still be some, but not like last year, or at least I hope. You can still use the synthetic pyrethroids to spray around windows, foundations, etc. of your home to reduce these and other invading pests. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Twig Girdlers

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This is the time of year that homeowners can start to find small branches, or even branch tips, on the ground. They pick them all up only to find a whole bunch more a few days later. There are several possible causes for this branch littering. The first is squirrels. Squirrels routinely bite off branch tips to build wintertime nests in trees. They will bite off a bunch of branch tips, drop them to the ground and then go pick them up and carry them to the tree. These branches are usually fairly short and if you look at the end, you'll usually find a very nice and neat angular slice like someone used a knife, or in this case, some very sharp teeth. The best thing to do is leave the branch tips on the ground so the squirrel can get enough material to build his nest and stop snipping off branch tips. Occasionally we'll also find blue jays in trees trying to harvest acorns. They can get kind of rowdy and in the process of trying to pull off acorns, the end of the branch may break off. These will always have acorns attached or a location where the acorns were attached. The last one will be the largest branch tips and the cut end will look like a miniature beaver had chewed all the way around. This is caused by an insect called a twig girdler. They lay eggs on the outer part of that branch, cut it off so it breaks in the wind and then the wind blows the branches around to move the insects to new locations. If you are finding these you should pick them up and burn them or put them in the trash to get the insects responsible out of your yard. And if you aren't sure what's doing it, call me! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Seed Corn Beetles and Green Cloverworm Moths

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I guess we can now switch from the late summer insect invasion to the early autumn insect invasion. A couple more have popped up in the past week or so that we should discuss. Two different people brought in small beetles that were yellowish with two black stripes on their back. These were about 5/16ths of an inch long and in both cases were around lights. This is one of the ground beetles known as the seed corn beetle. While they are called seed corn beetles they eat much more than just kernels of corn. They'll eat other things, they'll eat other insects. That's just kind of what ground beetles basically do, They have two generations per year and the second one is emerging as adults now. They will overwinter as an adult and one thing about them is that they are really attracted to lights at night. They are accidental invaders to your home and should be dealt with by sucking them up with the vacuum or spraying with a flying bug spray. They won't do damage in your home, they are just an annoyance. The other one probably won't even get in your home but is a nearly black little moth, very triangular form when they are resting on the side of your house and if you get up close they have a bit of a snout. This is the moth of the green cloverworm. They fly around outside your home nectaring on flowers but really just flying around. Unlike other moths they seem to be quite active during the day. There were a lot of green cloverworms feeding in soybean fields over the past month so their presence is not a surprise. If one does wander into your house, just swat 'em! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Time to start planting spring flowering bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Late September through early November is the time for planting spring flower bulbs, things like tulips, daffodils and many others. Personally, I'd want to wait a few weeks to get this soil cooled down a little bit. We've just come through a rather warm 3 weeks of September so normal soil cool down is just now getting started. But certainly take advantage of this time to get out and get your bulbs purchased. They've been in the store for weeks now! OR, if you dug up some bulbs last spring to separate and re-set them, get started now trying to find them, and good luck with that by the way. I never can remember where I've stored them when I do that! Bulbs need soil with good drainage. Heavy clay soils are not a really good location for spring flowering bulbs. Poorly drained soils result in bulbs that don't last long due to rots and drowning. IF you want to add organic matter like peat moss or something, you need to amend the soil about twice as deep as what you are going to be planting them. Dig an area up and add about 1/3 by volume of good organic matter, mix it well with the soil and then replace it, then dig into this to plant your bulbs. If you just amend the soil that's going in on top of the bulb, you create an in-ground container that water will infiltrate easily, get to the bottom of the planting hole and just stop. Hence the need to amend the soil below as well. Make sure you plant the bulbs as deep as the instructions call for or use the rule of thumb that they should be 2 to 3 times as deep as they are wide at the widest point. Settle the soil and add a little fertilizer! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.