Gardening With Chuck for April 7 - 13, 2014

Rhubarb!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I am a big rhubarb fan. I'll go ahead and say it, I am fanatical about rhubarb. From a nutritional point of view, it really doesn't bring much to the table. But I still love rhubarb because I grew up with it. We had a large rhubarb patch on our farm and every spring, for weeks on end, there was always rhubarb something in the kitchen. Once it's established, rhubarb plants can produce for decades with little care, but the trick is to get a good bed established. Rhubarb thrives in loamy, well drained high organic matter soils. Many of the soils in our area really have far too much clay. I recommend heavy amendments of well rotted barnyard manure - to the tune of 50 to 100 pounds per 100 square feet. I also like to locate my patch where it's going to have good drainage to help reduce the chance of drowning the plants. It also needs to be to the side of your garden or in a separate space. Being a perennial, once you get it planted and established, you'll probably never till it again. While late March and the first half of April is the time to plant rhubarb, because of the needs for major soil amendment, I would start working on my rhubarb patch area this year, for planting next spring. If you have a well drained loamy site all ready thought, plant your rhubarb soon. When you plant rhubarb crowns you want to plant them in a shallow trench with the eyes or buds ½ to one inch below the surface. Plants should be 2 to 3 feet apart in the row and if you do plant more than one row, make the rows about 4 feet apart. Fill the trench in and make sure water drains away readily. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Squash Bugs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The most common garden insect pest that I have to field questions about is squash bugs. Squash bugs will destroy a stand of most summer squash if not treated and probably other than a horde of grasshoppers, few insects are as destructive. They will feed on virtually any squash or pumpkin variety but for whatever reason, butternut and acorn squash seem to have the most resistance to them and are often not impacted. But if you are trying to grow zucchini or yellow crookneck summer squash, you'd better get a plan together. Squash bugs overwinter as adults hiding under debris in the garden, so fall tillage can be very effective in reducing their numbers. Adults become active in late May or early June. Females will begin laying eggs about that time and can continue to lay eggs clear into August. Most years we have two generations of squash bugs and it's the second generation that get's really bad. Basically, once you start to see even one squash bug, you'd better start spraying. You can try handpicking egg masses or even adults, but if you have very many plants, insecticides will be used. Squash bugs like to remain hidden so thorough spraying, including to the undersides of leaves is necessary. Some gardeners put wooden shingles near the base of the plants as squash bugs will hide under the shingle in the heat of the day making it easier to flip the shingle over and spray those that are hiding. But remember that it's easier to kill young squash bugs than adults. A very good bulletin about squash bugs is at the Extension Office and always read and follow the labels. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Winterkill, what it is and why it happens

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Winterkill is honestly a catch all phrase that we use when a supposedly perennial plant fails to survive the winter. In reality, winterkill can be caused by many things and absolute cold weather is often not the cause. Okay, extreme cold temperature can cause problems. Freeze damage can happen if a plant is only marginally adapted to our winter weather. You can often see part of a tree or shrub leaf out normally, but parts of it are totally dead. This is likely true freeze damage winterkill. Sometimes we put very winter hardy plants in pots and then they don't survive. There's a vast difference in temperatures 4 inches underground versus how cold the entire root mass gets in a pot outside. Sometimes, especially early in the fall or late in the spring, we can get extreme weather fluctuations that will actually freeze the sap in the trunks of trees and crack them. This damage will often show up later when the cracks become visible. The more common problem that we see that gets lumped into winterkill is actually winter dessication. This is especially common in evergreen plants include spruces, junipers and broadleaf evergreens like Euonymous, boxwood and holly. In this case the moisture is lost out of the leaves and can't be replaced through soil moisture. Needles and leaves will turn color and fall off, but often not until weeks or months after the damage. Sometimes dormant buds are fine, other times they aren't. Never be in a hurry in the early spring to try to deal with apparent winterkill. Just take some time to wait and see how bad the damage really is.

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