

Gardening with Chuck Programs for April 5 - 11, 2020

First Mowing of Spring

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. A lot of us got around to that first mowing of spring recently. People always want to drop the deck on the lawn mower for that first mowing and that is okay up to a point. The theory behind this is that mowing low will get rid of all that old dead grass from winter and make the lawn springier. That's the only reason, aesthetics, it doesn't do the grass any good, just the homeowner. It can backfire, in fact, if the mower is set too low and you scalp the turf, which means you cut into the crown of the plant. So how low can you go? Personally, to be on the safe side, I'd go no lower than 1½ inches for either tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass. But that is for one mowing and one mowing only. After that immediately raise it back up to 2½ to 3 inches for bluegrass, 3 to 3½ inches, and I prefer the latter, for tall fescue! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Early Tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Oh the treacherous race to see who can have the first tomato of the season. It's brutal, especially for some of the tomato plants. Tomatoes are warm weather plants and do not like cold weather. You can try to push the season but I would limit it to only two weeks ahead of normal planting time or basically the last week of April and ONLY if soil temperatures are above 55 degrees. Pick a small area of the garden and lay down drip irrigation lines and black plastic. Do this several days ahead of transplanting so the black plastic will warm up the soil. Cut a hole in the plastic and plant your tomato plants in the hole. Use some starter solution and then protect with a hot cap or water teepees. Do not do this with all your tomatoes but only a few, no more than 1/3 in case tragic cold weather returns! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Starter Fertilizer for Transplants

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When I was a boy helping my mother in the garden I always remember the special fertilizer we mixed with water when we were setting out any transplants. I didn't know why, but it's just what we did! Cold and cool soils in the spring can really mess up young plants. Even with adequate to high levels of phosphorus and potassium, those tender young and cold roots are sometimes not overly effective and the young plants can suffer from nutrient deficiencies. You can buy liquid transplant solutions or root stimulators and use according to label directions. Or you can get a granular fertilizer like 5-10-5, 10-20-10, or 11-15-11 and mix 2 to 3 tablespoons per gallon of water and let it dissolve for a few hours. Not all the fertilizer will dissolve, enough will to be of value. Use one cup per transplant. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Fruit Tree Planting Season

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. April is a good time to plant new fruit trees. Tart cherries, apples and pears are the most reliable of our tree fruits. Cherries are really the easiest of all of these. With apples and pears make sure you get cultivars that are disease resistant. With both apples and pears it's also best to plant two different varieties so that there can be cross-pollination. I just don't recommend sweet cherries or apricots because of their tendency to bloom early and get frosted. With nectarines look for Fantasia or maybe Red Gold. For peaches consider Harken, Intrepid, Redhaven, and Reliance for good fruit quality and better frost resistance. I encourage semi-dwarf trees because they have better root systems. Avoid planting on the south side of a house or a south facing slope to reduce early dormancy breaking. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Apple Tree Sprays

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. As apple trees get closer to blooming home orchardists need to be getting ready to gear up to spray. If you have an apple tree that is susceptible to scab or rust then you need to start spraying with fungicides just as soon as the first leaves appear, which was about a week ago on my apple trees. But for insect control you don't want to start spraying until most of the petals have fallen from the blooms. There's a limit to how many products are now labeled for fruit trees, basically there's four products. And they all have limits to how many treatments you can apply per year. Fortunately three of them have different active ingredients so you can rotate through them over the summer and never be in violation AND protect your fruit from insect and disease. Treat about every 10 days, 14 if it's not raining. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.