

Gardening with Chuck Programs for November 16 - 22, 2020

Start A Compost Pile

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. This is the time of year for cleaning up and really a great time to start a compost pile for the yard and garden. A compost pile is nothing more than a pile of decaying organic matter that you can use as mulch, fertilizer, soil amendment - just a lot of things. Because of wind and the light nature of things we are putting into it we often have some sort of small open topped structure to put the leaves, dried lawn clippings whatever in. We layer the leaves with a little bit of soil to add microbes for decay then wet it down, but don't drown it, and let it start to work. In weather like this a well working compost pile will steam in the cool morning air as the decay process creates heat. We have several bulletins about starting and maintaining compost piles at the Extension Office, call or stop by if you are interested! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Deep Water Evergreens Before Winter

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. We had a little rain last week. If you were lucky you maybe received 3/4 of an inch. In most of our soils that will wet the upper 3 to 4 inches. Evergreens, plants like junipers, cedars, arborvitae, pines, and especially spruces, because they keep their needles year round, will carry on photosynthesis in the winter. Photosynthesis needs water and if the roots of these evergreen plants are in dry soil the plant will start to steal water from the needles and will literally burn them up. It looks like we have some good warm days coming up that would be perfect for hooking the garden hose back up and placing that open hose out underneath your evergreens and let it run at a slow trickle for several hours to soak up the root zone. You don't need one of those root waterers, just a slow running hose for several hours. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Natural Needle Drop on Evergreens

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When we think of evergreens we often make the mistaken notion that they hold those leaves, those needles, for ever. That's not accurate. All those plants only hold those needles for 3 to 5 years and then they shed them. Which can cause some panic and it is often most obvious in pines. If you see your pine develop a bunch of yellow needles that start to fall off, don't worry. If you'll notice, these needles are all the furthest ones back on the branches which means they are the oldest ones. You can just leave these needles under the tree or you can rake them up, in the south they call them pine straw, and use them elsewhere in the yard as they make a great mulch. Just don't throw them away as that'd be a real waste. Now, if your evergreen's needles turn brown and don't fall off, that's a problem. Call me! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Winterizing Roses

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Roses are fairly hardy but many, especially hybrid tea roses, will do better with some winterization. Once the soil really cools off, normally by Thanksgiving, cut the stems back to 24 to 36 inches high. This is simply to make the plants more manageable. Next you may want to cut out any obviously dead canes, optional but helpful. Now bring in dirt from outside the rose bed to pile over the base of the plant. You don't want to scrape up dirt to do this as rose roots are often quite shallow. Next spring you'll remove this dirt and many want to just have a pile to the side of the yard for this. A few weeks after you pile the dirt up, and it has cooled off even more, you can bring in some organic mulch like leaves, compost, straw, peat moss, etc, and put over the soil mound. Let it all settle in and kick back for the winter. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

High pH Soils

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Most garden plants prefer a slightly acidic soil, something around 6.5 pH. It's just a range where most plants are comfortable and nutrient are readily available. Unfortunately many of our soils in this area, especially on upland sites, are alkaline or high pH. While not practical on large areas, for most vegetable gardens we can apply sulfur and lower that pH. Don't try it with gypsum or anything else, sulfur is the best way to do this. First though you want to take a soil test so we know how much sulfur to apply. Once applied, best in the fall by the way, you wait. It'll take several years for the reactions to occur and it is important to be patient. I double applied in back to back years about 15 years ago and managed to drop the pH from 7.8 to now 5.7 which is too acid. So now, I'll have to add lime! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.