

Using Rubber Mulches

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I was asked a question recently that I had not been previously asked and it took me a while to dig up solid information. The question has to do with the rubber mulches that are now available. They are basically old tires that are stripped of any metal and are large crumbles of old tires. Sounds like a good idea right? Turns out it probably isn't such a good idea. If tires were still made with just rubber, it might be okay, but tires now days are synthetic rubber and they can have all sorts of chemicals added. In the studies that have been done they are already finding a lot of zinc leaching out of these tires and it doesn't take too much zinc to start causing plant growth problems. Bottom line here is that I can not recommend the rubber mulch in gardens or landscapes. Stick to organic mulches and wood mulches. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Pruning Spring Flowering Shrubs

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Forsythia are finally blooming! They are sort of the bellwether of our spring flowering shrubs that include lilac, flowering quince, spirea, weigela and others. What all of these shrubs have in common is that they are blooming this spring on new wood and buds that they produced last summer. As such the time to prune these shrubs is NOT the first thing in the spring because you'd prune off many of the flower buds before they had a chance to impress us. No, you prune these just after they get through blooming. Prune them back a little further than you think you'd like them so that as they grow they don't get too big and tempt you to prune them again this fall. After you prune them also give them a balanced garden fertilizer. For a standard sized shrub a cup of 12-12-12 sprinkled around the base of each plant would be good. The fertilizer will help stimulate new growth to bloom next year! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Transplanting Tomatoes Early

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I have a lot of gardener friends who try to push the season on tomatoes all the time. I don't know if they like tomatoes that much or merely want bragging rights. I don't recommend getting tomatoes in the ground until soil temperatures are well up into the 60s, basically about Mother's Day weekend. If you want to push the season and I mean planting the last weekend in April, then you need to do more than use hotcaps or walls of water. You need to be out there two weeks before that laying down black plastic to start warming the ground up. Tomato transplants are easily cold shocked. Once they have been cold shocked they reset back to vegetative growth mode which puts off flowering and fruiting even longer. Okay, I know you are in a hurry, but understand the systems, climate, weather and the plants you are trying to grow, and then take the steps to work with all of those, don't try to fight them! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Starter Solutions for Transplants

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When we set out transplants it is customary to use a liquid starter solution to settle the soil around the roots and give a boost to the plant. While you can buy starter solutions to add to water you can also make your own. Get a bag of dry fertilizer where the second number is bigger than the first number, like 5-10-5, 10-20-10, or 11-15-11. Then add 2 to 3 tablespoons to a gallon of water several hours before you intend to use it. Not all of it will go into solution but enough will be helpful. Then use about one cup per transplant, or follow the mixing directions on the package you buy. Do not go overboard in either the mixing or the use of this. Nitrogen and potassium fertilizers are both salts. You want to mainly just give the plants a little boost. If you try to add too much, either as a starter solution or over the top, you can damage those tender young roots from the salt. Remember, a little goes a long ways! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Grass Sandbur Control

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When I say sandbur, several different plants will come to people's minds. I'm talking today about grass sandbur which is the plant that is a grass but it has the seed burs with lots of spines that get stuck in shoe laces, socks and pantlegs and you often feel them before you see them! This is a summer annual grassy weed just like crabgrass or foxtail. Three of our crabgrass preventers seem to be pretty good at controlling this plant. Pendimethalin, commonly sold as Halts, and prodiamine, also known as Barricade, are the most commonly found although oryzalin which can be found in Green Light Amaze is good also. Apply those anytime now but be sure to reapply if so directed by the label. Then in areas where you have had problems before, I would do follow up treatments with a crabgrass killer containing quinclorac with treatments about every three weeks from June 1 through August 1. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.