

Gardening with Chuck Programs for September 20 - 26, 2021

Harvesting Sweet Potatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Sweet potatoes are in no way related to Irish Potatoes. Not even distantly. And though many people call them yams, they aren't a yam either. Sweet Potatoes are in the morning glory family and they are a tropical vine. They are very cold intolerant and are one of the last vegetable crops we plant in the spring. Likewise, we want to get them out of the ground before a frost as that cold shock can damage the roots and shorten their storage life. Sweet potatoes do not lose quality as they get bigger so there is some advantage to postponing harvest until a frost is imminent though. If you have a lot of sweet potatoes you may want to get a start when it looks like a frost is in the long range forecast. But if you just have a few plants, and can get harvest done in a day or two, you can wait until the last moment! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Make Plans Now For Leaves

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Whether you want to think about it or not, if you have trees in your landscape you will have leaves to deal with before very long. You need to start thinking now about what you want to do with those leaves as they fall. All most homeowners can think about is raking them up and bagging or burning them, but both of these options are a sad sad waste of valuable organic matter. I like to spread leaves over a garden and rototill them into the soil in the fall. Another option, if you have a bagger on your mower, is to routinely mow the yard and then take the leaves and clippings and put into a compost pile. The combination of grass clippings and leaves will make a very rich compost after several weeks. OR you can just keep mowing over the lawn and mulch the leaves up and let them stay on the lawn for fertilizer. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Getting Poinsettias to Rebloom

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. While many of us prefer to support the poinsettia production industry by tossing our poinsettias at the end of the holiday season, a few intrepid gardeners enjoy the challenge of getting a poinsettia to rebloom at the appropriate time. To get a poinsettia to initiate flower bud production and thereby the changing of the color of the modified leaves the plant has to go through a period of at least 12 hours of total darkness every night for six weeks. It also helps if the temperature is in the 60s where the poinsettia is. The plant still needs sunlight during the daytime though so covering the plant with a cardboard box is the typical approach. Total time to reach blooming is 8 to 11 weeks after the dark treatment is started so you'll normally need to start this dark treatment now for the blooms to occur at the proper time! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Remove Dead Branches from Trees and Shrubs

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Right now before the trees and shrubs really start to change colors as we head further into fall, is a good time to removed dead limbs from shrubs and trees, that is if you can easily reach the dead limbs. Many shrub species can develop a lot of dead growth and getting it out of there now will help with the overall look of the plant in the long run. Cut the stems off as close to the ground as you can without damaging live stems. With trees it's important to prune it off JUST outside the bark or branch ridge collar. This is where callous tissue will grow over that dead stub to seal it off from disease in the outside world. If you cut into that collar it will take longer for the tree to heal over. It's easy to find these dead branches right now to do the trimming unless you have an ash tree that was defoliated recently. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Fall Removal of Watersprouts and Suckers

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Fruit trees, especially apple and pear trees, often respond to routine pruning by producing suckers from the base of the tree or watersprouts up from the limbs. Watersprouts are those straight as an arrow shoots that may grow two to five feet in one summer. We need to prune these out to keep them from competing with the desirable fruit bearing wood on the rest of the tree. While we traditionally have done this in the late winter when we are doing routine pruning there is growing evidence that removal of this growth during the growing season, even late growing season results in less regrowth of these undesirable and annoying little branches the following year. I'm going to give it a try this year on my apple trees. As I anxiously await harvest I'm going to start pruning these out and see what happens! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.