

NEWS RELEASE
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Fall Plant Care

Fall growing conditions are ideal for plant growth. Cool evening temperatures slow down plant respiration and therefore the plant builds strength. Now is a wonderful time to be planting and looking over your existing plants to aid them in their fall growth.

Woody plant root growth accelerates when the soil temperature is around 50 degrees. Presently, the area's soil temperature is 70 degrees. It would be good to have any new plantings in place prior to hitting the ideal soil temperature. I have been waiting to get past the heat of summer to plant.

Check any recently planted trees for their establishment progress. I like to use a tree strap at the base of the trunk attached to a stake. The strap is a breathable, soft polymer fabric with grommets at each end that secures without bruising the young trunk. It is reusable and I have one from the tree I secured last fall. One season of staking is all most trees would need.

Rabbits and other wildlife can be an issue year-round. I lost an evergreen shrub to rabbit feeding last season. I have used vinyl tree guards on my single trunk plants and wire cages on multi-trunk plants. I should have used one on the evergreen.

Wood chip mulch will insulate the soil temperature. New or replenishing mulch when the soil is at that 50-degree range will extend root development. An inch or two is sufficient for clay type soils. Oxygen is needed by plant roots and getting it too thick will reduce the availability. Keep mulch off the trunk as it needs air as well.

Moist soil is the best condition for plant growth. Mulch will reduce soil evaporation. An inch of moisture each week from nature or irrigation is usually adequate.

Some nitrogen fertilizer can be applied over the root system of plants as they go dormant. This nutrient will be taken up by the roots and stored for growth next spring. Apply enough water to get the fertilizer down to the roots.

Providing some care this fall will pay big dividends in your landscape.

You can find out more information on this and other horticulture topics by going to the Riley County, K-State Research and Extension website at www.riley.ksu.edu. Gregg may be contacted by calling 785-537-6350 or stopping by 110 Courthouse Plaza in Manhattan or e-mail: geyeston@ksu.edu.