

## FALL CARE OF PEONIES

Cut peony foliage back to the ground if this hasn't been done already. Compost or discard foliage. Fertilize peonies twice a year — in the spring shortly before new growth appears and then again in the fall after the plants have been cut back. A total of 1.5 to 2 ounces (3 to 4 tablespoons) of a 1-1-1 fertilizer such as a 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 per plant per application should be used. This amounts to 3 to 4 ounces of fertilizer per year. If a soil test reveals adequate levels of phosphorus and potassium, use a lawn fertilizer such as a 29-5-4, 27-3-3 or something similar, but cut the rate to 1/3 of the above rate. In other words apply ½ to ¾ ounce (1 to 1.5 tablespoons) per plant. The lawn fertilizer should not be a “weed and feed.” Never apply fertilizer directly on the center of the peony as the buds (eyes) may be damaged. Rather, place the fertilizer in a band from 8 to 18 inches from the center of the plant. Water the fertilizer in so the plant can take it up. Winter protection of herbaceous peonies is only necessary the first winter after planting to prevent alternate freezing and thawing from lifting plants out of the soil. A couple of inches of mulch should be sufficient. Any organic material that does not mat down will work and should be applied after the ground freezes. Avoid using leaves that will mat together. Remove the covering before growth begins in the spring. The less common tree peonies have woody stems like deciduous shrubs and should not be cut back to the ground or pruned in the fall. Collect the shed leaves and place in the compost pile this fall. Though tree peonies are hardy to Zone 4, they do benefit from a light mulching over winter. Also, it is recommended that tree peonies be fertilized during November to get the plants off to a good start next spring. It is best to take a soil test to see what nutrients are needed. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 pounds per 100 square feet. This would equal 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. Apply at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per square foot. Turf fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 also can be used but at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per 2 square feet.

### ***Begin Rabbit Protection Now***

Rabbits may begin to nibble on newly planted trees and shrubs through the winter. Protect your investment with at least 2-foot-tall cylinders of 1-inch-mesh, chicken wire, or similar barrier. Other control methods include plastic tree wraps and liquid rabbit repellents sprayed on the plants. Repellents will need to be reapplied each time it rains.

### ***Horseradish***

Horseradish is ready to dig after a hard freeze kills the foliage (usually November or December). The large roots can be harvested while smaller, pencil sized roots can be cut in 6-8 inch long sections as 'seed' or 'sets' for next year's crop which are then immediately re-planted. Another option is to leave the horseradish in the ground and dig as needed. If you choose the latter option, be sure to heavily mulch the area so that the ground doesn't freeze. To use horseradish, peel the large, fleshy roots and cut into sections. Use a blender or food processor to chop the roots along with a small amount of water and a couple of ice cubes. Vinegar or lemon juice is added to stop the process that produces the “bite” of horseradish. Add immediately after blending for a mild flavor or wait up to 3 minutes to give the horseradish more kick. Use 2 to 3 tablespoons of vinegar or lemon juice per cup of horseradish sauce along with ½ teaspoon of salt for flavor. Horseradish has an extremely strong odor and so you may wish to open the blender or food processor outdoors. Store in a tightly sealed jar in a refrigerator until ready for use.

## ***Potential Problems with a Warm Fall***

In the fall plants go through a process of cold hardening whereby they become acclimated to low temperatures. This acclimation is in response to cooler temperatures and to days becoming shorter during the fall months. As temperatures drop gradually, plants become progressively more acclimated to cold. A well-acclimated plant can survive much lower temperatures than one that has not had the opportunity to become used to the cold weather. The temperatures recently have been so mild that our plants have not hardened as much as they normally would. If temperatures drop very quickly, we may see damage to plants. There is not a lot that can be done to protect trees and most shrubs (other than making sure the soil under them is moist) but we may be able to help herbaceous perennials. Herbaceous perennials would not only include our perennial flowering plants that die to the ground each year but also other plants such as strawberries. As long as the weather remains mild or temperatures drop gradually, keep the plants uncovered to allow them to acclimate. However, if there is a sharp drop in temperature (to mid-teens or lower), throw mulch or some other covering over them to help moderate temperatures. Uncover again as temperature rise to allow the plants to continue the acclimation process. Some tender herbaceous perennials (such as strawberries) need a permanent mulch through the winter months to help protect them from desiccation and heaving caused by freezing and thawing of the soil. This is best done when temps have been cold enough to leave some frost in the ground.

## ***Knotweed Control***

Knotweed thrives in compacted soils, so a thorough aeration is the first step in control. This weed will not compete in a healthy lawn. Chemically, there are two options. Knotweed is an annual that germinates in late February or early March, so a preemergence herbicide can be used in the late fall (about now). Pendimethalin (Scotts Halts), Surflan (Monterey 'Weed Impede', Green Light 'Amaze'), Barricade, Dimension and XL are labeled for knotweed. (Note: Pendimethalin, Barricade and Dimension can be used on all Kansas turfgrasses, while Surflan and XL can only be used on tall fescue and warm-season grasses such as buffalograss, zoysiagrass and bermuda). The other option is to use a combination postemergence product such as Trimec, Weed-Out, Weed-B-Gon or Weed Free Zone after the knotweed has germinated in the spring but is still young. If spring seeding of the lawn is planned, your options are more limited. Buctril can be used on commercial sites and has a very short residual. It must be used on very young knotweed to get control. Trimec and others require a month before overseeding to thicken up your lawn. Obviously, don't use a preemergence herbicide if you are trying to get new seed established. For homeowners seeding in the spring, tilling will control knotweed adequately without using a herbicide. If seeding without tilling (e.g., overseeding using a slicer-seeder), then use a combination product such as one mentioned above just after the knotweed comes up in the spring, and be sure to wait at least a month before seeding.