

Pruning Fruit Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Now is the time to be out there pruning fruit trees. Unlike recent years, winter has been holding on and keeping plants fairly dormant, but that's going to be changing fast now that it's April. So before those buds swell any more, get those plants pruned! In 2 minutes on the radio it's hard to give you an indepth pruning workshop, but I can recommend some good online videos to help. In general, peaches need a fair amount of pruning every year. They bear fruit on last year's new growth so you want to prune to keep the tree in check and keep the new growth centered on major branches that can support the weight. Same thing goes for nectarines and would go for apricots, if they ever bore crops often enough! Cherries, plums and pears only need light annual pruning. Remove dead branches, branches that cross and rub or narrow crotch angles. Pears can be bad about narrow crotch angles which are weak and more prone to breaking in ice, wind or heavy fruit loads. Apples will become overgrown if left unpruned. Trees not pruned regularly are also more likely to only bear good crops every other year. A heavy fruit load one year will suppress bud formation in the fall so they don't have as much fruit the next year. Cut out suckers - those long canes that grow straight up several feet in one year, open up the center of the tree for more light to penetrate and reduce the size of the tree to keep it in check. Then of course remove narrow angled branches and dead branches as well. With any tree though, you should never remove more than 1/3 of the tree in any year. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Getting an Early Start with Tomatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Gardeners are obviously a very competitive bunch. It's the only way that I can explain all of the gardeners that want to get tomatoes started so very early. Remember that tomatoes are a warm weather plant. They need a soil temperature that is a minimum of 55 degrees. They'd prefer a soil temperature of 60 to 65, but they'll hang on down to 55. Air temperature also needs to be 55 and above. So if you want to get a jump on the season, you need to start with getting soil temperature warmed up to 55 degrees. Plastic mulch can do that, but you need to get it down for at least a week to get the soil warmed up. And then, if it is still cool and it stays cloudy for 3 or 4 days, like it recently did, you'll be hard pressed to hold that soil warmth. Check your soil temperature at 2½ inches deep around 11 a.m. in the morning for a good average temperature. Moving above the soil line, tomatoes can not tolerate frost, at all. You need to have them under hot caps or water teepees to keep the frost off of them. The other issue is that once you take tomatoes out of a greenhouse, they are often already starting to switch from vegetative mode to fruit production mode. If they then get cold shocked, they go back to vegetative mode and it is a long time to get them back into fruit production mode. So your plans for early tomatoes just got derailed. You may be better off to plant in a big pot on your patio that you can move in and out. I recommend planting tomatoes around Mother's Day or the 10th of May. If you want to try to push the season a little bit, I'd only try to push it 2 weeks earlier than that! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Applying organic matter to soils

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There are very few garden soils around that wouldn't be improved by adding more organic matter. Choice of organic matter, for the most part, isn't too critical, but how and when you spread it can be important. My general recommendation is to apply and incorporate organic matter into garden soils in the fall. In the fall there is an abundance of organic matter. We can add a lot of tree leaves, rotted silage or grass clippings that you've been stockpiling during the summer, the choices are many. You can add those, till them in and then they have all winter to start to break down and mellow out. You can still add organic matter in the spring, but you want to be far more cautious in what you use and how much you use. You wouldn't want to use silage in the spring, stockpile it off to the side and let it compost down during the summer and then add it in the fall. You can actually get ammonia fumes coming off of silage that will burn tender leaves. Good things to add in the spring would be peat moss, finished compost or well rotted leaf mold. For things like peat moss and leaf mold, add no more than 2 inches and till in. Finished compost you probably only want a half inch added and tilled in. There are some organic matter sources to avoid or use with great caution. Black walnut chips or sawdust should never be used in gardens as they give off compounds toxic to tomatoes and peppers. Other sawdust can be used, but sparingly. Because of the surface area of sawdust particle, the bacteria that attack the wood to break it down can tie up a lot of soil nitrogen. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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