

Feeding the birds

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A favorite winter activity of many homeowners is birdfeeding. This simple activity is fairly inexpensive and can be done on a small or a grand scale. It's a great activity for multiple ages and if you have any trees, shrubs or landscaping in your yard you can get birds to come in and feed. Many people become impatient in the fall when they go through October and November with few or no birds coming to their feeders. But once we get into late December and January, and especially once we get a little snow on the ground, natural food sources can become somewhat scarce and the birds will start hitting the feeders hard. Different birds like different foods and they like them presented in different ways. Finches like sunflower seeds or thistle seed and prefer it in hanging feeders. Doves and sparrows like millet at ground level, even just feed sprinkled on the ground. Cardinals, everyone's favorite it seems, really like sunflower and safflower seed and will eat it on the ground or from an open trough at various levels. Cardinals aren't much for hanging on to typical hanging feeders so get a low tray or a trough on a deck railing filled with sunflower seeds. You can also put out suet cakes for woodpeckers, nuthatches and creepers and if you really want to bring in the birds, in cold weather, put out a bird bath with a heater in it. I have a lot more information on backyard birdfeeding at the extension office as well as online. Stop by at 119 East 9th street or call 238-4161 for that information or go to gearycountyextension.com and click on the wildlife link to find them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Poinsettias

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In this week of Christmas I don't really want to start weighing you down with anything more to do, so let's talk a little bit more about poinsettias. Poinsettia's first hit the US market in 1825. Joel Poinsett was a botanist that was appointed as the first US Ambassador to Mexico. He quickly took note of the the large, up to 15 foot shrubs and brought them back to his South Carolina home where he started sharing them with friends. The modern day trade didn't really take off until about 1909 when the first company specializing in production and distribution. I'll just say up front that if you want to get your poinsettia to rebloom next year, you are in for a long task that involves precise day/night length treatment to trigger blooming and color development. For the commercial growers the process starts in July when they receive cuttings. It takes about five months to get those cuttings to the right size and proper stage of bloom. If anything, including temperature, humidity, fertilization and day length aren't just right, the entire lot will become a worthless bunch of sick or strange looking plants. While poinsettias were traditionally red, the past 20 years have seen an explosion in breeding and selection. One of the largest poinsettia firms, the one that started the big trade in the early 1900s, had 65 different cultivars of poinsettias this year in a variety of colors, flower form and size. If you want to see these, just go to www.ecke.com and start poking around their website. Oh, and don't worry about kids or pets being poisoned, poinsettias aren't poisonous, it's just another myth. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What to do with your Christmas Tree

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. While some of us just got our Christmas trees up and decorated, other families will soon be taking their tree down. If your tree is stored away between Christmas seasons, then you can just tune out now. But if your's was recently an actual living and growing tree you now have the conundrum of what to do with the remains of what was once your lovely pine, spruce, fir or cedar. The absolutely worst thing you can do is to throw it in the trash. While it may be convenient, it's a waste of perfectly good organic matter! Some years a local club collects real trees and uses them to build wildlife habitat piles around the area. I haven't heard for sure yet this season, but I'm sure they will be collecting them. Make sure you get all your decorations removed before you take it to their collection point which I will share with you once I hear. For me, my Christmas tree, once we take it down after New Year's Day, will go in my back yard to reside under my bird feeders. I just lay mine down, I've seen some folks tie it upright to a nearby tree. Regardless, the birds will use it for shelter and cover during the months ahead. If you have a chipper shredder you can also run your tree through it and turn it into some really awesome, and great smelling, mulch. If you don't have a chipper shredder you can just cut the branches off and use them as protective cover over tender perennials. The main trunk can be cut up and burned in a wood stove after it dries down. I wouldn't recommend putting it in a fireplace as the resin causes a lot of popping and sparking. But please don't trash you tree! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.