

Gardening Tips for December 9 - 15, 2013

Time to stop planting trees and shrubs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay, after our second good hard cold snap in less than a month, forget what I said last week and just stop planting trees and shrubs UNLESS we have a prolonged warm spell that will get the frost out of the ground...which I don't see coming just right away. One of the ideas of dormant season planting is that you get the plant in the ground while it is dormant, get the soil all settled around the root ball and then when it starts to grow in late February or March, it's all set and you minimize transplant shock. The fly in the ointment is that for this to work, the soil has to be friable so that you can establish good root to soil contact. The soil insulates the roots from the cold winter air. I love the word friable as it applies to soil. Friable means that it has some soil moisture and when you pick it up in your hands it easily breaks down with just a little pressure into smaller particles. You don't want powder dry soil and obviously not wringing wet soil. And you need to have soil that isn't frozen. If you dig up soil and see frost in it, you will not be successful in getting it broken down to allow for good firming, not packing, but firming. If the soil can't be firmed around the roots it means that cold air, really cold air like we've already seen and will likely see again this winter, can infiltrate down around the roots and cause freezing injury which is often desiccation injury. Even heavily mulched, it's hard to get good root soil contact and problems can develop. So unless it really warms up in the coming weeks, you're probably better off to just wait until early March!

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De-icers and plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It isn't even January yet and we've already seen street crews out using pavement deicers. That doesn't bode well for the winter, but remember, December can be ugly and the rest of the winter normal or warmer than normal. Just so long as we don't have an ice storm like 2007 or 1974. De-icers are a very necessary item when you live in areas that have freezing temperatures and precipitation. So to think that you just won't have to worry about them in this area is quite unrealistic. De-icers, for the most part, work because they are salts. With one exception, true de-icers, if used in excess, will cause problems for plants because of the salt that they will put into the soil. For plants along streets we can also have the added problem of de-icers splashed on plant foliage. Generally this is a problem on our evergreen landscape plants like junipers, yews, pines, spruces even broadleaf evergreens like holly, boxwood and euonymous. The first damage will be salt spray injury to the foliage and then you have the problem of salts washing into the soil. For these plants, once it warms up, try to wash the foliage off with a garden hose. Then in warmer weather try to water heavily, without drowning the plants, to dilute the salts. For your own use, try to limit how much deicer product you use. If you don't have to go someplace, see if mother nature will cooperate in a day or two and remove the ice. Remember that fertilizer can work as a deicer, but it is a salt can have the same kind of problems with it as regular de-icers. Use all in moderation and be patient when possible. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Gifts for Gardeners

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It's time to start my annual roundup of gift giving ideas for that gardener on your list. Gardeners, serious gardeners that is, can be very hard to buy for especially if you are not a gardener also. To be right honest, a gift card may often be the best gift you can give them. If you can get them to make up a wish list, that is very helpful as well, but make sure that they tell you what item from what company and preferably a very specific description perhaps a model number page from a catalog or even a web address. Trying to buy a new garden tool for them, unless you have that very specific item description is going to be an exercise in frustration for both of you. Magazine subscriptions are usually pretty safe IF your gardener likes to read. Take a look at what magazines they already get and then try to find something different. If you need some suggestions, consider Organic Gardening or Horticulture for starters and if you need more help beyond that, give me a call. I've known some gardening spouses to purchase garden seeds of vegetables or flowers that they wish their gardener would grow for them. Many garden centers are already getting seed packages in for next year so just talk with your local nursery about those options. If your gardener likes perennials then a gift certificate to a local nursery is not out of order at all. I know many people detest the "impersonal" feel of a gift certificate or a gift card BUT remember that gardeners can be very particular. You may consider an apple tree an apple tree, but if your gardener wants a Fuji, a Winesap just won't do! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm

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