

Give Young Trees A Head Start

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Okay, it's quiz day on Gardening with Chuck.

What one thing can you do with young tree and shrub plantings that will help them to have maximum growth rate in the first few years? Routine watering? Well, that's not the answer I was looking for but something to remember. But that doesn't mean watering every day as it is very easy to drown new young trees. Fertilization? Nope, that's not it. In fact as long as the soil isn't horribly deficient in everything, I don't even like to fertilize new trees and shrubs until about the 3rd year they are in the landscape. Too many people get way carried away with fertilization and end up burning plant roots because of too much fertilizer. The one thing that you can do when you plant a new tree or shrub that will give it the best chance for survival and good early growth is simply creating a turf and vegetation free zone around the base of the tree. My forester friends like to refer to grass as the creeping green death of trees. Turf is highly competitive for young woody plants. It is hard to imagine but in tests where grass and vegetation was kept clear out at least three feet from the trunk, trees had 200 to 300% greater growth. That's 200 to 300% larger trunk diameter, increased mass of leaves and branches, leaf area, leaf weight, literally every measurement taken. The study also looked at mulches vs bare soil and could find no difference between them so I'd go with a mulch zone, but keep that turf back at least three feet from the base of those trees. But don't forget the water also, especially if this drought continues! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bird Feeding A Fun Family Activity

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It occurred to me recently that while I am asked to talk to many different groups around the state every year about backyard bird feeding, I seem to rarely discuss it on this program. Backyard bird feeding is a fairly low cost way to bring wildlife into your yard where your entire family can enjoy it. As long as you have some trees and shrubs in your yard, you can hang a bird feeder, fill it with sunflower seeds and before long have daylong joy of watching the birds in your backyard. You don't have to have numerous bird feeders in your yard, just one will work. I would prefer one of the tube feeders with 4 to 8 large openings and then use black oil sunflower seed. Black oil sunflower seems to have the best all around attractiveness to most species. Even the little goldfinches or pine siskins have no problem opening these seeds up. Another option is to put out a suet feeder. The blocks of suet are readily available and also fairly cheap, sorry, I had to say it, and will draw in woodpeckers and nuthatches. Beyond that there are all sorts of different seeds you can feed. I usually avoid most seed mixes as they have just enough good stuff to get your attention and then enough cheap stuff to keep the price down. Just stick with things like black oil sunflower. If you want to attract sparrows, real sparrows, not house sparrows, and doves, then get some white proso millet and feed it on the ground or at least on a low raised platform. The other item that can be a big draw in the winter is a birdbath with a heater to keep it open. Open water can draw as many birds as seed can! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Water Conservation Planning

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In case you've missed it, we're in a drought. And at least in the short term (1 to 3 months that is), it looks like the pattern may be stuck. Even if it does start to rain or snow and bring us even close to normal precipitation, Milford Lake is quite low. Junction City's well fields are along the Republican River and the flow in the river directly impacts water resources available to pump. Whether we like it or not, municipalities in our area may have to initiate water conservation plans this year. With that may come some restrictions on outdoor water use. We've been down this road before but it's easy to forget. IF we get to the point that we do have restrictions, there's a few things to keep in mind. The first thing is the lawn. You may be very proud of your lawn, but in a semi-arid climate, a plush European style lawn is a luxury. Mow it high, stay off of it and let it go dormant. Even if the drought continues for months or years longer, we can re-establish a new lawn in just a month or two. Your top priority needs to be trees and shrubs. A good shade tree takes 20 to 25 years to grow. We saw mature trees, big old trees, suffering last year. So that's what you focus what little outdoor water you can use on. Until this drought breaks, I would be hesitant to do any more planting than you have to, at least on trees and shrubs. Investigate drip irrigation for younger plantings and even 10 to 15 year old trees. You put the water right where the plant wants it and you waste far less. We do have bulletins at the Extension office on water conservation so stop by and pick them up if interested. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.