

Forcing Bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. After last weeks arctic cold blast, many gardeners may be in the process of packing it in for the winter. But you can start working now to have some mid winter color in your home by planting spring flowering bulbs in pots and then using a process called forcing to get them to bloom in a couple of months. The trick to forcing bulbs is a cold treatment. If you've got some tulips or daffodils or hyacinths, the most popular to force, that you didn't get planted you can use them or look for some clearance deals at garden centers. You want to squeeze as many bulbs into a 5 to 7 inch pot as possible. Use a good soil-less planting mix on top of gravel or rock chips for good drainage. Unlike planting in the ground, you want the tips of the bulbs right at the soil surface. Once planted you want to water thoroughly and discard any water remaining in saucers after the soil is well wetted. At this point there are a lot of options. The pots will need 10 to 12 weeks of temperatures of 40 to 50 degrees. If you have an extra refrigerator that you can set at 40 degrees it works great. Or you can dig a trench about 15 inches deep, place the pots in them, fill around the pots with soil and then leaves and sand over the top. A root cellar can work well, a cold frame. But get them into cold treatment. At the end of that 10 to 12 week period, move them into a partly shaded location with temperatures of 60 to 65. There should be some yellow sprouts starting to show and once they turn green you can bring them in to normal household conditions, keep well watered and wait for the show to begin! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Poinsettia Care

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The story of how the poinsettia became associated with Christmas is fascinating and far too long to deal with here. But very soon now, if not already, many households will be getting a poinsettia to grace their home during the holidays. While poinsettias can bring weeks of pleasure and they aren't too demanding, all too often they are abused and they turn ugly in a hurry. Remember that poinsettia's are native to lower mountain regions of Mexico so they don't like it overly warm, but they don't like cold drafts either, and for gosh sakes don't let them dry out and don't drown them. When you buy your poinsettia make sure that it's in a paper bag or wrapped in paper (not plastic) when you take it to your car if it is below 40 degrees. As soon as you get it home, place the pot in a saucer and punch holes in the bottom of the decorative foil they always wrap the pot in. You want water to drain out of the pot after watering. Check the potting soil with your fingers daily and water when it feels dry to the touch. Not getting the water out of the pot will cause rot root and death. Letting the plant wilt will cause the leaves to all fall off. Locate your poinsettia where it isn't exposed to cold drafts from doors, or near furnace vents where it'll get hot. Try to place it where it'll get as much light as possible, but they seem to do okay with the light levels in most homes. You can get them to re-bloom next year (too late to start on that this year if you've kept one over), but I honestly think the best thing to do is simply toss them when they start to fade and buy a new one next year! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Selecting Christmas Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I've never seen an official estimate, but I'll bet a good 1/3 of all Christmas trees are bought the first week after Thanksgiving. For various reasons many homeowners have an artificial Christmas tree. But for the rest of us, nothing beats a green renewable resource known as a real Christmas Tree. Whether it's a pine, a Fraser Fir, a spruce or a cedar tree cut out of the pasture, having a real tree just seems to make Christmas real for a lot of us. The best way to make sure that you have a fresh tree is to go to a Christmas Tree farm and cut your own. If you go to a tree lot you can check freshness in a couple of ways. Pick the tree up and thump the butt end on the ground firmly a couple of times. If very few needles fall off (and a few always will), then take a needle and bend it between your fingers. If it bends easily then you've got a tree that's fairly fresh. If tons of needles fall off or the needles snap between your fingers instead of bending then put the tree back and keep looking. The most important thing to do as soon as you get your Christmas tree home is to cut about a half inch off the bottom and then get it in water as soon as possible. There is a lot of debate about whether various additives to the water actually keep the tree fresher or not. From my experience, the most important you need to do is simply get the tree in water and then check the water regularly. For the first few days check the water 3 or 4 times a day. The first few days it will really take up a lot of water. After a few days this should stabilize and you may only have to add water once or twice a day. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.