

## Storing Apples

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. September and October is the time of year when you can get fresh apples. Oh sure, you can buy apples year round, but apples in the fall are most likely fresh picked and are going to have the best flavor. Having grown up on a farm with a large orchard there is still nothing better than a tree ripe apple freshly picked and eaten. As a kid coming home from school I'd walk through the orchard and grab two apples right off the tree. The first one was usually pretty well eaten by the time I hit the house and the second one wasn't far behind! Many of the commonly available apple varieties will last several months IF the right conditions are met. Several varieties have fairly short shelf lives. Wealthy (an older variety many folks aren't familiar with) and Paulared are only going to last a couple of months. Gala, Jonathan and Grimes Golden can hang in there up to 4 months. Golden Delicious, empire, Delicious and Braeburn can go 5 months and then you get into the really long keepers which includes things like Idared, Rome Beauty, Winesap, Fuji, Granny Smith and Arkansas Black which can go 7 or 8 months. That assumes that these apples were picked under good conditions, are free from blemishes or insect damage, have intact skin are stored in plastic bags or some way to maintain good relative humidity and are temperatures around 35 degrees. If you try to keep fruit for long periods I recommend sorting through it about once a month to remove fruit that is going out of condition. Of course, another way to keep it, is to dry it, freeze it or can it, or just eat it soon and enjoy! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Renovating Old Lilacs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Every once in a while I'll get a call about renovating an old stand of lilacs. Lilacs are, for the most part, fairly low maintenance shrubs that we often find around old farmsteads and homesteads. In some cases these plants may be over 50 years old, possibly approaching 80 or 90 years old. While they can get infested with ash/lilac borers, and they can get powdery mildew on the leaves, neither of these things will usually kill a lilac plant. But over time they can get scraggly looking with few blossoms and lots of dead stems, probably from borers, and maybe they are a little too tall with nothing but stems down low and a few leaves up top. In some cases trees may have overtopped the lilacs. Lilacs are really full sun plants. The more shade they get, the fewer blossoms there will be. So at some point in time you may have to decide to take drastic action and do a complete renovation. Keep in mind that any pruning that you do in the late summer or fall will result in no flowers next year. Ideally, pruning occurs just after blooming in the spring. But drastic times require drastic measures. And in this case, it may require a complete mow down. While I don't recommend it, I do know of cases where farmers have set their big rotary mowers 6 to 12 inches tall and mowed right over the top. I'd rather have you do in with loppers and be more selective and make cleaner cuts and then pull out all the old dead stems from the crown, BUT I've never seen lilacs killed with this drastic effort. Remember that if you do a full crown removal, it may be 2 or 3 years before they'll bloom again. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Harvesting Sweet Potatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'm really surprised that more gardeners don't grow sweet potatoes. They love heat so they should do great for Kansas gardeners, and for those who plant them, they usually do. Unlike Irish potatoes, which are not related to sweet potatoes, and many other vegetables, sweet potatoes do not lose quality as they get bigger so you can wait until the last minute to harvest them if they are still growing well. BUT, be forewarned that cold temperatures can damage the sensitive roots, which is what the sweet potato that we eat technically is. The Irish potato is a tuber, but sweet potatoes are a root! So it is critical that you harvest sweet potatoes no later than the first fall freeze. Sometimes it can be a waiting game and if you have just a few hills that you can dig in a short period of time, go ahead and play the game. But if you have a lot of hills, you may want to test dig one hill and see if the roots are big enough to be the size that you want. Sweet potatoes can store for quite a while, but you have to treat them right. Immediately after digging, place the roots in a warm humid location for 5 to 10 days to cure. 85 to 90 degrees would be ideal. This curing process heals wounds in the tender skin from digging, generally toughens up the skin and also helps convert starches to sugar which improves the overall flavor of the roots. After this curing process, the roots need to be stored but not in a refrigerator. Even at this stage cold can damage the roots so keep them above 55 degrees. Temperatures lower than this injures the roots, shortens the storage life and gives them an off flavor. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.