

## 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. Two things that come right after holidays are Christmas trees and Poinsettias. Let me start by mentioning that we do have a really good bulletin on poinsettias and it is also available online. Just Google poinsettia Kansas State and it should be one of the first couple of hits that come up. Not only does the bulletin cover all that I'm about to tell you, it also covers the history of the poinsettia and what you have to do next fall to make it bloom again, if you can keep it alive. The key to keeping a poinsettia looking good is keep it away from high or low temperature extremes and then keep the soil moist without drowning it. That's all there is to it. If the temperature is below 50 degrees when you buy your poinsettia, get it wrapped in paper to protect it going to your car, then take it right home and inside before you unwrap it. Locate it where it gets some sunlight, if possible, but not near a door where it gets cold air drafts nor right over or under a furnace vent or too near to a wood stove or fireplace. All of these extremes will shorten bloom life. Most poinsettias come from the store with the pot wrapped in that nice shiny foil. Make sure you have a saucer to set the pot in and then punch holes in that foil so water can drain out. Then check the potting soil daily and water when it feels dry to the touch. If a poinsettia wilts it will lose its leaves. If the soil becomes waterlogged it will quickly develop root rot and die. As to what to do with it after Christmas - read the bulletin or toss the poinsettia out and buy a new one next year to support the industry! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Why aren't my trees leaves falling?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If you've been paying attention around town you've probably noticed a lot of trees that still have leaves on them. Granted, the leaves are dead and not very pretty. Because of the incredibly warm October weather, many trees hadn't really started the process of dropping leaves. Then we got cold, we got really cold and the leaves were essentially killed. This happens periodically and is called marcescence. Marsescent, literally translated means to wither without falling off. Normally, as a tree moves into fall, the plant starts preparing for the season change by developing a layer, called an abscission layer where the leaf attaches to the tree. It seals this off, the abscission layer becomes a weak point and eventually the leaf falls off the tree. Most of our native trees did a pretty good job of dropping leaves in a normal fashion this year. The trees that we are seeing holding leaves, well, other than pin oaks that always hold their leaves, are things like ornamental or Bradford pears, lacebark and Siberian elms, essentially trees that aren't native to our area. My hackberry and ash trees lost their leaves just fine, but my lacebark elms are still loaded with leaves and half developed seeds. In and of itself, marcescence won't harm the tree. The leaves are dead and the tree is dormant. The leaves will slowly fall off over the winter or once new leaves start coming out in the spring. What can happen is that a heavy snow while there are still leaves on the tree can cause excessive limb damage. Hopefully this won't happen, because there still isn't anything we can do about it except wait! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Why is my houseplant losing leaves?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A real common problem for houseplants this time of year is loss of leaves. The most common problem is light, or specifically not enough of it.

House plants are usually very dependent on sunlight coming in through windows because, well, the lights we normally have on in the evening just aren't bright enough to create photosynthesis.

Daylength is growing shorter every day. The sun is getting lower in the horizon which means the sun has to travel through more atmosphere which eats up more photons that never get to your

houseplant's leaves. Plants will normally slow down growth and may start dropping older leaves, while still putting on a few new leaves. If the plant is losing leaves throughout and putting on no new leaves the plant is probably under other environmental stress, unless it's a ficus plant which just tend to lose leaves for no good reason! The key thing at this time of year is to stick to basics.

Water when the soil is dry to the touch about ½ inch deep in the pot. Don't think you're underwatering the plant and then drown it. Far more house plants are killed by overwatering than underwatering. Don't start pushing the fertilizer. If you want to set up grow lights you can try to help it that way, but generally I encourage just letting the plant rest at this time of year.

Essentially, just keep the plant alive. Next spring carefully turn the potted plant over, knock the plant out of the pot and see if it is root bound. If it is, then spring is the time to repot those rootbound plants. Trying to do it this time of year is just another way of stressing and killing them! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.