

Lights for plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I have a book on my bookshelf that is titled, Sacred Cows make the best hamburger. So let's just trod all over urban myths. And the sacrificial cow today is.... grow lights! For decades we've seen the advertisements for grow lights and their balanced wavelength that is ideal for plant growth. Well guess what - it's all marketing hype. The light given off by standard fluorescent bulbs is just fine for growing plants. The problem in most cases with using artificial lights for growing plants is that there simply isn't enough light intensity. You don't want to use incandescent lights for plants because they get too hot. I haven't seen that much work done with LED lights yet and they are kind of pricey anyway, for now. But fluorescents seem to give the best balance of light intensity, cost efficiency and overall utility. The trick is keeping the lights as close as possible to the plants. This is most critical when it comes to starting annual plants, flowers or vegetables, from seed. Light intensity is one of those odd situations where doubling the distance cuts the light intensity to 1/4 not 1/2. So moving lights twice as close, from say 4 inches to 2 inches doesn't double the intensity, it quadruples it. When you are starting plants from seed, especially plants like tomatoes and peppers, you want to keep the lights within an inch or so of the top leaves. This will help keep the plants from getting too tall and leggy. You want these lights on at least 12 to 13 hours a day, but there's no reason why you can't run the lights 24 hours a day. It won't mess up the flowering sequence at all! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.

Start Pruning Fruit Trees NOW

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Hasn't the recent warm up been great? The piles of snow are starting to shrink and that's a good thing. Tree buds are going to be starting to swell soon, well they already are actually. I always dreaded this time of the year when I was a kid because that was when, even if there was still snow on the ground, I was expected to head out on Saturday's and even for an hour after school, and start pruning fruit trees. We had about 40 fruit trees in an orchard and I was taught how to prune by the time I was about 10. Let me also say that most of these were good old fashioned full size trees, not dwarfs or semidwarfs! So, IF you are fruit trees and IF you are suffering from spring fever, start getting out after work and spend 30 or 40 minutes every evening that the temperatures are above freezing and prune the fruit trees. You want to establish good form with strong branches and good crotch angles. You want to keep fruiting wood close to main branches and main branches short enough that you don't have to prop up limbs. You want to removed crossing branches. You want to remove dead wood and you want to keep the height down to where you can easily reach to harvest and or spray with your sprayer to control insects and diseases. If your fruit trees have gotten too big and way out of control you will need to do this over several years. You never want to remove more than 1/3 the total mass of a tree in any one year. Removing too much at once you will stimulate excessive sucker growth that you'll just have to take off next year. And remember, pruning is done annually! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fertilizing spring flowering bulbs

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Believe it or not, there are people that plant new tulip and other spring flowering bulbs every fall. When they get through blooming the bulbs are dug up and tossed out or given to others to replant. Most of the rest of us leave bulbs in the ground for several years, which is certainly an option. But if you ignore those bulbs, over time the bulbs will become fewer and smaller and you eventually wind up with little clumps of greenery and no flowers. You can slow this inevitable downward spiral with timely fertilization. For years we blindly followed tradition when it came to fertilizing bulbs and fertilized after blooming with the thought that at that time the plant was busy building up reserves for next year's blooms. Well, had we thought about this a little bit more we would have realized that given the time it takes for nutrients to go into the soil, this was way too late. If you are going to fertilize spring flowering bulbs, do it when they really start growing in the spring, and I mean the leaves really start growing. The roots are most active at this time and they will more readily take up the nutrients. Won't this make the leaves grow a little bit more, you may ask. To which I respond, of course they will and that's the whole point. Leaves are the factory to building the plant. Use a general purpose balanced fertilizer like triple 10, 12 or 13 at the rate of 2½ pounds per 100 square feet of bulb bed. If you have small plantings, then this works out to about 1 rounded or heaping teaspoon per square foot. Apply soon after growth starts in the spring and water in! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.