

Go Easy On The Deicers

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We had a little brush with winter already earlier this month, both in temperatures and precipitation. We were fortunate that we didn't get the 4 to 5 inches of snow they were initially talking about, but we did get just enough snow to make roads, driveways and sidewalks a bit slippery for a day or two. Granted, I'm to that age where falls aren't a laughing matter and we do need to be cautious and careful on slick walking surfaces. Sometimes that first thing we do is grab the deicer and go to town, sometimes laying down so much that even after the snow and ice are gone, the sidewalk is STILL white! Deicers work because they are salt based. Fertilizer works as a deicer, because it is essentially a salt. Salt and soil are not good friends. Salt destroys soil structure, raises the pH and raises the sodium level. Over a period of time, excessive salt will kill plants and make it very difficult to grow plants. It doesn't matter what the salt source is. So for the rest of the winter, here's some tips. Try to clear snow before anyone has walked on it. Once snow is packed it essentially turns into ice and then you've got a problem. If you have to use deicers, go easy on them. Give them 24 hours to work, whenever possible. Don't expect a clear sidewalk in 30 minutes. If the sidewalk or driveway is clear and you see a lot of deicer product still remaining, sweep it up and put it in a bucket for another time. Don't sweep it onto the lawn, flower beds or plants. We will need to use deicers at times during the winter, but just remember to take it easy with them to reduce plant damage! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Prepare for your own Thanksgiving

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. For many of us, our Thanksgiving meal is very much an all American meal. The turkey is an American species, sweet potatoes, corn, cranberries are all American plants. Potatoes, while not originally from North America, did originate in South America. Pumpkins for pumpkin pie - yup another American classic, as are the close cousins of all those winter squashes. For the gardener who plans ahead, much of the Thanksgiving feast can be a home grown feast, just like the Pilgrims meal was. Obviously, in many cases it's too late for this year, but as you start planning next year's garden, why not devote part of it to a Thanksgiving garden? Obviously we aren't quite in the right climate for cranberries - we just don't have too many bogs around here. And many folks aren't going to raise their own turkey, although if you live in the country you certainly could. Contact me for the timing on that however. You don't want to start too early or that's liable to be one tough old bird by the time Thanksgiving rolls around! Timing of planting can be very crucial as can choice of varieties for the various aspects. Really good jack-o-lantern pumpkins aren't the best pie pumpkins. Winter squash needs to be planted in late spring or early summer. Corn needs to be planted in large blocks to get good pollination, and then obviously frozen or canned to keep for November, and the same for green beans if green bean casserole is one of your regular dishes. Irish potatoes can be planted in July for a fall harvest, just in time. Kids can find this great fun as well. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Christmas Tree Care

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I saw my first real Christmas trees for sale the week before Thanksgiving this year. I had a Christmas tree grower friend tell me that 80% of his tree sales occur within the first week after Thanksgiving - and much of it the first three days after Thanksgiving. So if you get a real tree, I'm betting you're getting ready to get it if it isn't already up. So I'll cut right to the chase here. Buy as fresh a tree as possible. Bend a few needles in your fingers. If they snap like a match stick - move on and try another tree. Once you get your tree selected and home, get it in water as soon as possible. You don't need any additives in the water, you just need to make sure that you keep water in the stand and make sure the tree is taking up the water. Which is the most important thing you can do. Just before you put the tree into the stand, cut off the bottom ½ to 1 inch of the trunk. When a Christmas tree is cut the sap has a lot of resin in it and that resin plugs up the little vessels in the trunk that water moves through. This isn't really a defense mechanism, it's just that the water in the sap evaporates quickly and what's left is the sticky resin. Cut the bottom of the trunk off to remove those resin plugs and get it in the stand and filled up with water as soon as possible. In most cases, during the first few days or week, the tree will take up a lot of water. This is because the tree dried out during the shipping process. Once the tree rehydrates it will slow down on the water use, but for those first few days I'd be checking it two or three times a day and fill it up, then check it at least once a day. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.