

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. If you have sweet potatoes in your garden you need to get them dug before a frost. Now, 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. Cold can damage the roots after curing so keep them above 55 degrees. Temps lower than this injures the roots, shortens the storage life and gives them an off flavor. To answer the oft asked question, yes ornamental sweet potatoes are edible too. They just may not be as tasty. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.

Spring Bulb Planting

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Against my better judgement I'm going to talk about planting spring flowering bulbs. I say against my better judgement because I really like to hold off and plant spring flowering bulbs in late October and November. BUT, those spring flowering bulbs are readily available now so let's go ahead and talk about them. IF we have a wet snowy winter like everyone is talking about, then some early spring color will be a very welcome sight. But you need to start working on that now. One of the cool things about spring flowering bulbs is that you can mass a bunch into the flower bed and have waves of color not only in timing of blooms but in height of the blossoms as well. From earliest to latest we have crocus, grape hyacinth also known as muscari, then daffodil, hyacinth and ending up with tulips. When you plant, plant in masses for better effect. A group of blooming crocus look better than one here and one there. Pay close attention to planting depth and remember that the listed depth is to the top of the bulb not the bottom of the hole. If given a range of depths, shoot for the deepest depth. Deeper planting will keep them blooming better for longer periods of time before you have to dig them up and reset them. When you are buying bulbs they may be in a mesh bag or you may be able to pick them out of a big pile. Healthy bulbs will be firm and have a thin papery covering over the outside. This early in the season avoid those with green tips as these are breaking dormancy too soon. And when you plant them, mix a little bone meal into the soil under the bulb.

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Reblooming Christmas and Thanksgiving Cactus

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When I was a kid growing up, my great Aunt Mabel had a huge Christmas cactus on her back porch that always bloomed every year. She gave me a start of that plant and it never bloomed for me. I think my Mom still has that plant but what I've since found out was that I was taking just too good of care of that plant. If you have one of those Christmas or Thanksgiving cactus, and yes they are different species, but closely related, there are certain physiological requirements that the plant must have before it will bloom. Flowering for these will not occur unless induced by temperature and/or light. If the plant is held at a fairly constant 50 to 55 degrees, flowering will occur regardless of day length, but the flowering may be sporadic and not uniform. So, if you can subject your plants to uninterrupted nights longer than 12 hours AND temperatures between 59 and 69 degrees for 25 consecutive nights you will initiate flower production and it will be much better than using temperature only. Starting on the first day of autumn we will have nights of 12 hours or longer which will work as long as we don't get room light. A good way to make sure that this is happening is to cover the plant with an aluminum foil lined box. Cover the plant at 6 in the evening, uncover it at 7. Keep it cool and do this for 25 days and then you can bring it back to normal conditions. If you do this you should soon see buds starting to form and then it will take 9 to 10 weeks for the flowers to fully form and start to bloom. Keep these in indirect sunlight and the soil moist but not soggy.

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