

Hollies for Kansas

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 folks, thanks to all those Christmas carols, the December holidays invoke visions of the deep green leaves and bright red berries of holly. So periodically, folks think it would be fun to have a holly plant in their home landscape. There are many many different species of hollies, and most of them are not very fond of Kansas weather. They don't like our cold winters, they don't like our soil pH and they don't like our heat and drought. Well that pretty well sums it up. BUT there are some options. American Holly is a medium sized tree that IF you can find it, will probably do pretty well. Inkberry holly may be our most reliable with great foliage, but as its name implies, the berries are black. Deciduous Holly has bright red berries, but loses its leaves. We may be on the northwest edge of its range. Winterberry holly has large red berries but again, loses its leaves in the winter. Most of the hollies that folks try to grow are actually a hybrid holly known as Meserve Hybrid hollies. Such classics as Blue Prince or Princess or Blue Boy and Blue Girl are examples of this. I have a couple of these on the east side of my house, to protect from heat and drought, and they have done fairly well although the female was hit hard in 2011 and 2012 by the heat and drought. Notice I said female - most of these hollies and hybrids need to have separate male and female plants. Usually one male plant per 4 or 5 female plants is more than adequate to get pollination. Make sure you know what you are getting and which sex it is. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Fruits and Nuts

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One of the big questions at the holidays is what to do with all those fruits and nuts. And I'm not talking about the relatives that are coming to visit! As a culture we have a long history of giving fruits and nuts at the holidays and today we still give a lot of fruits and nuts as gifts. It is always a treat to receive these wonderful edibles. But of course, the problem is that we all tend to overeat at the holidays so any way that you can spread these treats out, the better. Fruit is highly perishable. Some fruits, like apples and pears can go in the refrigerator. Tropical fruits, like pineapples, bananas, etc, probably need to be used as soon as possible as they really don't refrigerate well at all. Citrus fruit storage life can be extended a week to ten days in the refrigerator, but don't try to push them too far. Apples and pears, can stay in the fridge for several weeks, but try to get them utilized within 15 to 20 days. Nuts are a better situation. While their high oil content causes them to go rancid quickly at room temperature, they do store well in the refrigerator and even better in the freezer. They will tend to absorb any other flavors so keep them, shelled or unshelled, in tightly fitting plastic containers or even heavy re-sealable plastic bags. Shelling them first is preferable as they'll take less room. While nuts can last up to a year in the freezer, they will be of far better quality if used within six months. So enjoy your fair share of fruits and nuts and even consider giving some of your own. You and your friends can enjoy your edible gifts this holiday season and into the new year as

well! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Holiday Cactus

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Way back in early September I talked about Thanksgiving and Christmas cactus but thought I'd touch that subject again briefly this morning. These two closely related cactus are epiphytes native to jungles of South America. Epiphytes grow on other plants for support but not for nutrients, so they aren't parasitic plants. The two cactus are distinctly different but closely related enough that they will hybridize. Generally the stem segments of Christmas cactus are smooth while Thanksgiving cactus have hook like appendages on each stem segment. If yours has some other shape of stem segment, it may well be a hybrid. Both species prefer indirect light so they are well suited to many of our homes. If you have them in direct sunlight the leaves will often turn yellow. They are quite tolerant of common household temperatures. Soil should be kept constantly moist but not waterlogged. Keep in mind that even though they have the name cactus attached to them, they are a tropical jungle plant! As always, do not water by the calendar, determine watering need by touching the soil daily. Give them a light fertilization every other week. I've been seeing a lot of photos this fall of people having great success getting them to bloom. If yours are not blooming, then they haven't had the right treatment. The right treatment requires a little moisture stress and then some cool treatment as well as long nights. I don't have time to discuss that here, but give me a call and I'll be more than happy to share those details with you so you can get yours to start blooming! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.