

Gardening Tips for December 19 - 25, 2016

What to do with the tree after Christmas

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 take your Christmas tree apart and put it in a box back in the attic you can just sort of doze out now. But if you have a REAL Christmas tree, it'll soon be time to take it down, and out of the house. Sigh..... The saddest thing that I see every year are people that put their tree on the curb for the sanitation crews to pick up. You see your old Christmas tree is a valuable resource that shouldn't be wasted. Personally, my tree goes out back and laid on the ground next to the bird feeders. This provides shelter and protection for the birds from weather and predators. Some people will tie their tree upright to a nearby tree but I just lay it down. Some folks who have access to a chipper will turn their Christmas tree into mulch, very nice smelling mulch I might add, and add a little extra mulch to a flower bed or to protect tender perennials. Even if you don't have a chipper, you can cut off the branches and lay those around and over tender perennials. If you have a wood stove or an outdoor fireplace, the branches can make great kindling. With all the resin they pop and spark too much to use in an open fireplace though. The last option is to use them for wildlife habitat away from your bird feeders if you have a larger property. Locally the Geary County Fish and Game will be collecting them for wildlife habitat. The collection point will be in the lot at 14th and Jackson. Remember that the trees need to have all decorations removed prior to taking them there to be dropped off. Also remember that this is Christmas trees only, no branches or other yard waste will be accepted! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Some Good Old Fashioned Winter Weather

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I doubt that there was a single person around the area during that abnormally warm November that wasn't thinking the same thing I was. Oh we're going to pay for this nice warm weather later! And we are. For the record, the average high for today is 41 and the low is 21 and the record low for today is 14 below zero. It could be worse. We went from really warm to pretty cold entirely too quickly. Obviously single digits and below zero temperatures are not unheard of during December, and no, this doesn't mean that we aren't experiencing global warming. But when we hit extremes like we had - remember it was 83 just about a month ago, it can have some unfortunate effects on plants. We will see some winterkill, or freeze injury on plants once we roll on into spring. Some of it will become apparent right away, some not for a while. Expect a little more die back on roses. I had roses blooming on Thanksgiving. Some of my rose bushes have frozen buds that were still trying to form. We expect some winter die back every winter, we'll just need to do some extra pruning next spring. Some borderline plants, like mimosa and crepe myrtle may have some regrowing to do from the base of the plants next spring. It's been quite a few years since we've seen these really freeze back so this may catch some folks off guard. I'm also concerned about trees not getting enough sap into the root system. If too much sap was still up in the trees with these temperatures, we could see some frost splits especially on thin barked trees. Nothing to do at this time, just wait and see in spring. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

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 different species of hollies, and a lot 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.

What to do with those 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.

Better Start Planning Your Garden Now!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Three days after Thanksgiving my first one arrived. I mean, come on! They never used to show up until early January. But now days, if you want the latest and greatest, you really need to get them ordered before Christmas to make sure that they don't sell out! Oh, I'm talking about garden seed and garden seed catalogs by the way! The folks that put together those catalogs, and now days the web pages, are experts at marketing. They know exactly how to hit you when you are most vulnerable to the impulse to buy! So before you crack open a single catalog you need to do your planning first! Now, in full disclosure I do need to admit that I have already ordered some garden seed. First, you need to review your 2016 garden. So, how'd it go? What worked, what didn't work? What did you wish you hadn't planted, what do you wish you'd planted more of? Or maybe I should say, what did your family rave about the most and complain about the most? Now get a large piece of graph paper and lay out your garden plot. Then start planning what will go where and be realistic. If you have tomatoes planted on a 1 foot grid, you are not being realistic - they need more space than that. Plan for relay planting, that means planting short season crops early and following them up with something like beans and then going back with fall crops later. You can get more production in a small space by relay planting. Once you've got this all done let your spouse and or family approve the plan. Once the plan has been approved, then you can start looking at the catalogs! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.