

Planting Fruit Trees

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 want to plant some fruit trees, then right now is the time to start planning for that. With the recent snowfall you can locate the first criteria that I suggest people use. Find the last place that the snow melts but will receive good summer sunshine. I'll give you a hint, it isn't the south side of your house. The biggest challenge that we have in growing fruit is dealing with late frosts and freezes. People think that they need to protect trees from winter cold, when most trees can handle the cold just fine. When we stick them on the south side of the house though, they warm up way too early causing them to break dormancy early and then bloom early, and there you go, a disaster. Probably the two most likely species to get nipped by late frosts are apricots and peaches. While certain cultivars may be labeled as early or late varieties, for apricots, this may be less than a week difference. But go ahead and plant the later varieties anyway. Some later blooming apricots include Harglow, Harlayne, Tilton and Hungarian Rose, but I'd save my money and just buy fresh apricots at the store. Peaches can have fruit bud hardiness issues in addition to a predisposition to breaking dormancy early. Peach varieties to consider include China Pearl, Encore, Risingstar and Intrepid. Apples, pears and pie or tart cherries generally have better frost tolerance and hold dormancy longer. We do have a good bulletin at the Extension Office on Small and Tree Fruit cultivars that has great information on cultivars of fruits that have done well in Kansas at research trials. Stop by and pick up a copy!

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Pawpaws

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One fruit that nearly everyone has heard of, but few have actually eaten is the pawpaw. This tree is native to Kansas, including Geary County, but is foreign to many people. Personally I have eaten them, and while they are okay, I'm not a fan. But, they are certainly one to consider if you are a local or native foods fan and some people truly are big fans. Many people haven't seen pawpaw trees because they do have some very specific requirements. They like slightly acid soils so we're only going to find them on creek and river bottoms. They have large leaves, at times almost looking like a tropical tree, so protection from winds is a good idea. They naturally occur as an understory plant so you may want to plant them where they will get partial shade. If you have heavy soil, work up an area a year in advance adding a lot of organic matter in an area as deep as the tree will be planted and 2 to 3 time further out. Basically, dig a hole 18 inches deep and 5 feet across and mix lots of organic matter in and let it sit for a year before planting. Pawpaws have fleshy roots and should be planted in the spring unless you have container grown plants. After planting, keep the soil well watered but not soggy for the first couple of years and keep all other vegetation, especially grass, away from the trees, at least three feet from the trunk of the tree. You can find pawpaws, including selected cultivars in the trade. You can also buy seedling pawpaws from the Kansas Forest Service, likely from Kansas seed sources if you want to plant a small grove. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Selecting Shade Trees for your yard

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The ice storm last fall may well have made you realize that you have a tree or two that needs to be replaced in your yard. Often when I'm asked about selecting a shade tree the question is immediately followed with, "and I want it to grow fast and be strong." Unfortunately, those two phrases don't go together when you are talking about trees. Most of the trees that are getting ripped up by wind and ice storms are fast growing trees. Simply because they grow fast, they are not going to be strong. What you should be considering instead are factors like size of mature tree, soil conditions, wind and sun exposure, desired form and leaf color. If the tree is going to be near a house, then you want a smaller tree that won't grow into the house. If the tree is overhanging a sidewalk or driveway, you probably want to avoid trees with messy fruits or nuts. If your soil is alkaline, meaning high pH, then you want to avoid trees that have iron chlorosis problems like pin oak and sweet gum. You want to avoid trees with known severe environmental, disease or insect problems. Ash trees are highly at risk because of Emerald Ash borer. Many pines are susceptible to pine wilt. Red maple and blue spruce do not like our hot and dry windy summer weather. Now it may sound like there aren't any trees suited to Kansas and at times I'd almost agree with you. But we do have several good choices, just none that are fast growing and strong. So figure out your locations, give me a call and I can help you narrow down the possible list of new trees for your yard. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.