

Happy New Year

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. For starters, Happy New Year one and all. So now we're in to January. We've got two more solid months, well, truly three months, of unpredictable weather. We've had one blast of winter, and now we're back to running above normal temperatures. Normal temperatures throughout the month of January are highs in the upper 30s and lows in the upper teens. Records are all over the board. You can't spend all of the next two months just staring at catalogs and web pages of gardening supply houses, you have to do something to keep your sanity. In all reality, most homes aren't well suited to growing a lot of plants. Not enough windows and light levels are just too low. But there are things that you can do in the winter months. If you are going to try to keep that poinsettia, continue to water it as needed, not by the calendar. If you haven't picked up our bulletin on poinsettia care, look for it on line or drop by the office to pick up a copy of it. Have a little fun and grow an amaryllis. It may take a little looking around, but there are bulbs out there. These can grow well even in low light homes. Stop in at a garden center and pick up some paper white narcissus bulbs and force them. They don't require the long cold treatment that other bulbs do and about the time that cabin fever is going to do you in, you'll have some fresh blooms in the house. And yes, you can spend a little time looking at the catalogs and websites, but take it easy and don't go overboard. Follow my previous recommendations and use some common sense. You've got a lot of winter to go yet! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bird Feeding Part 1

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 my favorite winter past times is feeding birds at my house. Backyard bird feeding can be very entertaining and fascinating and can easily be enjoyed by people of all ages. While some people do spend a lot of money keeping their multitude of feeders filled during the winter, it is something that can be done fairly inexpensively. For a starter I recommend a fairly simple hanging feeder filled with black oil sunflower seeds. Most of the birds that people more want to attract, things like cardinals and finches are going to have a strong preference for black oil sunflower seed fed in an elevated, or hanging, feeder. I am not very fond of bird seed mixes as much of the seed that's in them is grain that should be spread on the ground for ground feeders like doves and sparrows. When these are put in a hanging feeder, many species will just toss it out on the ground to get to the seed, usually sunflower seed, that they prefer. There are some nice ground feeders - basically a tray with a screen in the bottom, that the seed mixes can be used in, just don't use them in hanging feeders. Place the feeder where you can see it easily - some feeders you can easily hang off the eaves of your house. You can usually expect more bird activity if you have trees in your yard - if you have a new home - get some trees planted. Once the feeder is up and filled, then you can sit back and watch the birds, especially on colder and snowy days. For those who want to know what those birds are, I have a free pocket guide to Common Kansas Backyard Birds available at the Ext. Office. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bird Feeding Part 2

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Yesterday I talked about some basic back yard bird feeding and today I want to talk about some further specialized activities for birds. There are many birds that spend the winter that won't eat seed from your feeders, but if you put out a bird bath they will come and take a drink. Since we can expect freezing weather a bird bath heater is generally used. Birds that will visit a bird bath but not a seed feeder include robins, bluebirds and Cedar Waxwings. Suet is a type of processed animal fat that is frequently fed mixed with grain in semi hard blocks in the winter time. The suet is very high in energy and many small birds and woodpeckers will readily consume it especially in the coldest of weather. There are special wire suet cake holders that these suet cakes are put in. In addition to woodpeckers, nuthatches and Brown Creepers will also use suet. There are many different types of suet blocks now available including some that are stabilized with corn meal and other feed products that allow you to use it in the summer time. While they do sell suet blocks that are supposed to attract fruit eating species, I've never seen much success with these. Nyjer thistle, often called just thistle seed, is a small black oil seed that finches really enjoy eating. The advantage to it is you can put it in a tube feeder with tiny little slit openings that squirrels, and other feeder pig species, can't get in to. Thistle seed is more expensive but you don't go through it as fast, so in the end you may spend less money. If you'd like more information on back yard bird feeding please contact me. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Garden Shows Are On The Horizon

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One way that many gardeners used to deal with the winter gardening duldrums was to attend garden shows. Unfortunately, that isn't as easy as it once was as there are fewer and fewer garden shows to attend. Part of the problem is that these shows take a lot of time and effort for the organizers and the businesses that participate and attendance has fallen steadily for the past 20 years. People just don't attend these things like they once did - everyone is out there looking on the internet instead! But here's what I know so far for the upcoming months. The Topeka Garden Show is held in the ExpoCenter in Topeka February 10 - 12. I will be there on Saturday morning the 11th giving a program on landscaping for birds. That same weekend, the Kansas City Remodel and Garden Show will also be happening at the American Royal Center in KC. What was once the Wichita Garden Show is now the Wichita Outdoor Living and Landscape show. It is at Century II March 3 through 5. And that is about all that I could find in the state. The Manhattan Garden Show has been replaced by gardening seminars that are held in conjunction with the indoor farmers market. The next one will be held this Saturday, January 7th from 9 to noon at Pottorf Hall at the Riley County Fairgrounds. The topics to be discussed include composting, composting with worms and forcing bulbs. Each session is one hour long with composting at 9, composting with worms at 10 and forcing bulbs at 11. These are free and open to the public. There will be two a month for at least January and February. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Investigate Drip Irrigation

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There are a lot of things that impact how much our gardens produce and the big one, temperature, is out of our control. But things like soil tilth and soil fertility we can and should work on, to improve the inherent productivity of our soils.

One thing that I will guarantee that we'll have to address each and every year, at least occasionally during the year, is supplemental moisture. Even in a wet year like 2016, we had some extended dry spells which required us to provide some supplemental irrigation. All too often most gardeners idea of irrigation is to set out a sprinkler, turn it on and let it go.

Unfortunately this is not only the biggest waste of water one could have, it also creates a great environment for disease problems to crank up and early in the season it will also encourage a lot of weeds! So the option is to use drip irrigation. Drip irrigation is especially useful for anything you grow as individual plants like tomatoes or peppers, cabbage, even hills of vine crops. You just run your main distribution lines then put an emitter right at the base of the plant. You turn on the water, the water goes right where the roots are and everything else stays dry. You can turn it on in the morning and turn it off at noon or when you get home from work. Since the water is applied slowly it all soaks in to the ground and doesn't run all over the place. Back in the days when I grew over 100 chili pepper plants, I used drip irrigation and it made life so easy. Drip irrigation supplies are available at most garden centers and hardware stores and is very easy to set up! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.