

Dealing with Valentine's Day Flowers

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There's a lot of flowers moving around the area right now as there is every Valentine's day! A lot of money is being spent on a very perishable item but just a few simple things that you can go will help to maximize the life of those flowers. Trust me, I spent a lot of hours delivering flowers over the years so here's some things to keep in mind. The number one thing that you can do for those flowers is to keep the vase filled with water. Flowers are a living and growing thing and they need water. As soon as the flowers arrive, either at home or at work, check the water in the vase. I'll be the first to admit the sometimes those vases tip over while out on delivery. No matter how carefully you drive, some arrangements are just unstable. So top off the water when it arrives and check it daily. If the water starts to turn cloudy or yucky looking, dump it out and put in fresh. It may even help once you get the floral delivery to recut the stems underwater and put them pack in the vase. If you received loose flowers, get them into water as soon as possible, cutting the stems off first, again underwater is preferable. If a rose starts to wilt, fill up the sink with warm water, put the rose completely in the water, cut off a couple inches of stem and then leave it in the water for several hours. This often helps revive it. Those flowers are a special gift from a special person so let's enjoy them as long as possible! However, some of you may get some chocolate on Valentines Day. You know that stuff isn't good for you so just bring it to the Extension Office and we'll take care of it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Peach Leaf Curl

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 peach trees in your home orchard you have probably seen times when they are growing great, they may even have some tiny peaches on them and all of a sudden one day you notice that the leaves are turning reddish, getting kind of distorted and basically looking all puckered up! This is a fungal disease known as peach leaf curl. Once you see evidence of the disease, it is too late. You need to treat now, before the leaves even start growing because the leaves become infected with the disease just as they break dormancy and come out of the bud. Fairly quickly the infected leaves die and fall off the tree. The tree then puts out new leaves and eventually looks none the worse for the wear.

Unfortunately, if there is fruit on the tree, the loss of energy production from leaves falling off and new leaves being developed will cause some of the fruit to fall off or ultimately to be smaller. If you have year after year of uncontrolled peach leaf curl though, it will shorten the life of the tree. Peach leaf curl is easily controlled, but like I said, you need to do it now! If you need to prune your tree, do it before spraying as it will be much easier to treat with less wood. The fungicide you need is chlorothalonil which is contained in many garden and general use fungicides. Mix it up and thoroughly cover the tree spraying from at least two sides if not three. Do this when the temperature is above 45 degrees and rain is not forecasted for 24 hours. While not a necessity, I find that I get better control with two treatments 10 to 14 days apart. Fewer leaf buds are missed this way! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pruning Young 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. People love to plant fruit trees. The idea of fresh fruit picked ripe from the tree is very appealing and understandably so. Unfortunately too many homeowners plant some fruit trees, get them well started and finally about five years later they start to think about pruning. Fruit trees are just like kids - you have to start training them from the very beginning if you want to have a good outcome. The goal in developing a strong fruit tree is to have 3 to 4 scaffold branches attached to a main trunk. With peach or nectarine trees you have a vase looking form that is fairly open in the center with the branches coming out from the trunk nicely staggered around the tree. With apples and pears, think of a spiral staircase with a central leader and the scaffold branches coming off like steps around that central leader. Ideally the branches, with either method, will be about 6 to 10 inches apart on the trunk with no scaffold branch directly below or opposite another branch. Even with dwarf trees you don't want the lowest branch lower than 18 inches, in fact I encourage 3 feet to allow easier access with a mower, obviously a push mower. If you feel you have to mow under it with your riding mower, maybe you shouldn't be planting fruit trees! You also want the branches to form wide angles, 60 to 80 degrees, to the main trunk. These are going to be your strongest attachment. Narrower than 60 degrees and you start running into issues with branches splitting out under ice, wind or heavy fruit loads. Naturally it'll take a few years to get this fully developed, but you need to start the first year! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pruning 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. Growing up on a farm with a good sized orchard, I knew that starting in late February I'd be spending evenings and Saturdays for several weeks pruning the fruit trees. It was just expected of me. While a fruit tree can be pruned at any time of the year, late winter and early spring is preferred as you aren't working around leaves so you can see the tree structure better and the buds haven't swollen very much yet. The more the buds swell the more easily they can be knocked off a tree, ultimately removing flowers that may have eventually become fruit! We have a good bulletin on fruit tree pruning that I would encourage you to pick up. Not all trees are pruned the same so understand your tree. Cherry, pear and plum trees need fairly light annual pruning to remove branches that are causing or may cause a problem. Peach trees require a fair amount of pruning as you want to encourage new wood each year. Peaches, and nectarines, produce blossoms on new wood that grew last year so annual pruning is required to encourage this new growth. Apples generally bloom and bear fruit on short spurs that are several years old. Often it's best to look at a tree when it is blooming this year to see where it is blooming to help you understand where to prune it next year. If you've been pruning regularly then all you need to do is keep the size of the tree in check, and remove water sprouts from the trunk and branches. Remember that you want to control how much fruit is set in any one year. An excessive fruit load this year, usually means small apples and very few blooms next year. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

How about a native fruit tree

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. People are always talking to me about planting fruit trees and they are asking about apples, pears, peaches, cherries - basically the standard traditional fruit trees. So just for fun, sometimes I ask them if they've ever considered planting some of our native fruit trees. They ask what those are and I tell them, pawpaw and persimmon. You should see the looks I get from those folks! Pawpaw and persimmon are both native to Kansas and occasionally found in the wild. Pawpaws have really cool looking purplish red flowers that once you see you will never forget. Pawpaws are a small tree, generally only 15 feet tall. They often are found growing in deep loamy soils near creeks in the understory of other trees. The fruit has a unique flavor with a texture much akin to bananas. It seems to be a love hate relationship with pawpaws although I find I'm rather neutral to them. Persimmons are often found in open areas and on rocky hillsides. It's a larger tree, up to 30 feet tall on occasion. Persimmons have separate male and female trees. The bark of mature trees is interesting with a very obvious blocky look to it. Blossoms are pale yellow and small. Persimmon fruit is green when unripe turning to a yellowish salmon color when ripe. When I first moved to Junction City the house I lived in had a persimmon tree out back. My father always warned me not to eat a green persimmon, so of course I had to. It has to be the tarest fruit I have ever tasted. Ripe fruits are commonly used for preserves, if you can get them before the wildlife does! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.