

Gardening with Chuck for November 27 - December 3, 2017

Poinsettia Care

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Almost as ubiquitous as Christmas trees at this time of year are poinsettias. Poinsettias have a great history starting with their discovery in Mexico by our first Ambassador there, Joel Poinsett, who discovered this beautiful shrub growing south of Mexico City. From there, the rest is history as they say! Over 30 million poinsettia plants are grown annually in the US and who knows how many more get shipped in from elsewhere. Poinsettias are big business which just drives the point that I make every year that it's easier to toss the plant after the holidays and don't worry about keeping it alive and getting it to rebloom. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Poinsettias can be somewhat picky and if you want them to maintain their best look as long as possible, there's a few things you need to remember. They are sensitive to cold and drafts of any kind. If it's below 40 degrees when you buy yours, make sure it's wrapped, preferably in paper, before you leave the store. Then take it home immediately. Avoid any locations in your home with temperatures over 80 or under 60. Keep them away from cold windows, furnace vents, and doors. Make sure that water can drain out of the pot so punch a hole in that shiny foil that the pot is wrapped in and place in a saucer. Poinsettias are sensitive to root rot. They are also sensitive to wilting. Even slight wilting will cause them to lose leaves. Check the water twice a day and water when the soil feels dry. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Are Poinsettias Poisonous?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I love history and traditions of plants. How many years did people think tomatoes were poisonous because they were related to the poisonous nightshade? Finally some brave person ate one and the world has never been the same since. Poinsettias are in the Euphorbia genus of plants. These plants have milky sap and quite a few Euphorbiaceae have a compound in the sap called diterpenes which can be both an irritant and toxic. For years, many households wouldn't have poinsettias because of the common belief that they were poisonous so they didn't want them around their young children. It took decades to finally get this myth dispelled. It wasn't until the early 1980s that it was finally proven that poinsettias were not poisonous. In 1985 the American Medical Association, in their Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants, stated that the poinsettia have been found to produce either no effect or occasional cases of vomiting. Anyone can virtually be allergic to anything and cases of nausea from ingesting poinsettias is likely caused by an allergic reaction. Some people are still hesitant to believe this even though there have been several cases of poinsettia producers eating poinsettia leaves in public demonstrations to prove that they aren't poisonous. I don't think they taste very good though so don't toss them in your salad! So if you were hesitant to have a poinsettia in your house because of the poison risk, fear no more. Go buy one and enjoy it this season! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Winterizing Strawberries

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Strawberries are a very popular fruit crop for many home gardeners, yet they can be challenging to grow because of winter time issues. The following comments only pertain to inground strawberries. If you are growing them in pots you have a different set of issues in keeping them alive and you may want to call me. Once strawberries have been hardened off, they can withstand temperatures below zero. Because of the abnormally warm conditions this fall, strawberry plants have not been hardening off very quickly and that really cold morning right before Thanksgiving may have actually done some damage. Which for established strawberry beds probably isn't a problem as they may needed to have been thinned out a bit anyway. But in typical recent fashion, those lows in the teens last Wednesday were immediately followed with temperatures pushing 70 on Friday. It's hard to get plants acclimated with weather conditions like that. Regardless, if it looks like the plants have kind of gone dormant over the next few weeks you probably want to mulch the plants down with straw to help them through the winter. The other challenge we can face with strawberries in winter is frost heaving. Cycles of freezing and thawing can actually push that taproot up out of the ground several inches. By mulching you can temper those freeze thaw cycles so this is less of a risk. Get your wheat straw and shake the slabs apart and evenly apply about 3 inches over the strawberry bed. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Christmas Greenery

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In previous programs I've talked about a couple of the common Christmas plants, Christmas trees and poinsettias. So let's kind of close out the Christmas Big Three and talk about greenery. Greenery can cover a whole host of plant foliage that we associate with Christmas. It can be evergreen boughs be those pines, firs, even spruce, junipers and cedars or those same materials turned into wreaths. It may be holly branches with their deep green leaves and bright red berries or even the festive mistletoe. The one thing that they all have in common though is that the minute you put them up in your house, they are starting to dry out. There are several things that make holiday foliage an even bigger fire risk than your Christmas tree. A Christmas tree has a water source but holiday foliage doesn't. Our homes are quite warm with usually very low relative humidity. This causes that foliage to dry out very quickly and become a fire hazard very quickly. You should never use holiday foliage around an open flame of any kind and to be right honest there's no need to. There are so many LED products out there that look like a flickering candle, just use that! A wreath on the outside of your front door doesn't concern me too much but be aware that every time the door gets shut it's probably bouncing a few more needles off that wreath. One final word of caution concerns the holly berries. They do have some toxic compounds and any loose berries should be tossed out. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What not to put in your garden soil

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I am sometimes amazed at what people dump into their gardens in the off season. It may be compost, it may be kitchen scraps of plants, it may be leaves and grass clippings from the last mowing of the season, it can be almost anything. Unfortunately, people sometimes think that they are doing their garden soil a favor when in reality they are potentially causing themselves headaches for future gardens. Let's start with ashes from a wood stove or fireplace. In our part of Kansas, these have no place in your garden. Ashes are high in potassium, they have very little phosphorus and they have absolutely no nitrogen. In general, soils in Kansas are high in potassium and low in phosphorus and nitrogen. To make things even worse, ashes raise soil pH and most of our garden soils already have soil pH higher than is desirable. Don't add ashes to your garden soil unless you have very acid soil. Sawdust is something else not to add. While sawdust will add organic matter, due to the small size they are quick attacked by microbes for decomposition. The population explosion from this activity can actually cause a severe short term nitrogen deficiency. Mix sawdust with grass clippings and put in a compost pile for a year before using. The last thing to not add is anything that came from a black walnut tree. Walnuts release a compound into the soil called juglone. Juglone is very toxic to tomatoes and related plants. All plant parts contain this compound. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.