

Enjoy Your Holiday Season!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

This has been a trying year and we aren't out of the woods yet. We've lost friends and we've lost family this year. It's going to be a tough several months ahead of us. Normal is a "ways away" as my Mother would have said. But we have reason to hope and I see that hope in so many people's comments, messages and discussions (from a safe distance) in recent weeks. These reasons to hope and a positive attitude is what we all need to focus on in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Sure, many of us will be celebrating Christmas without the large family gatherings we might normally do, but that's okay. Avoiding large gatherings will be helpful in reducing the risk of virus spread. Pick up the phone for a Christmas Day chat or even video chat with family members. It's different, it's not the same without a hug, but staying apart now will help make it possible to gather together next Christmas.

There are so many holidays, celebrations and observances in December and early January. Our Jewish friends have just finished Hanukkah. In recent years I've enjoyed learning more about the Festival of Lights. I've made it a point to learn more about Hanukkah and many other celebrations that have not been part of my life, yet fascinating to learn about them. So to all my Jewish friends, a belated Hanukkah sameach!

Even among the various Christian faiths there are many different holidays in December, many revolving around various aspects of the story of Christ's birth. Just because I may not celebrate them, I still find them fascinating. Many of them are country specific from all around the world. A few days before Hanukkah started, Buddhists celebrated Rohatsu or Bodhi Day, a day of remembrance and meditation. The day after Christmas starts the Kwanza celebration, a celebration of African-American culture that runs through New Year's Day.

Over the millennia many cultures and countries have had celebrations surrounding the winter solstice (December 21st this year). Many pagan cultures still celebrate this day, making note of the then the Earth's North Pole's tilt is furthest away from the sun making it the longest night of the year (in the Northern Hemisphere). It also is a celebration because after the winter solstice the days once again start getting longer! I know I look forward to it. Granted, December 22nd has only 3 seconds more of daylight than the 21st, but by the end of January we are gaining 2+ minutes of daylight per day!

So what difference does it make to be aware of the other "not-Christmas" celebrations? To me the answer is crystal clear. Our country came about as a mixing pot of cultures and people from all over the world. Our strength is our diversity; it has been for centuries and will continue to be so. Learning, understanding and respecting the various holidays of these various cultures makes us more aware how many of our own holidays are blends of what have been before. It also gives us a greater appreciation for each other.

If I run into you on the street or in a store, and can recognize you with your face mask on, I may wish you a Merry Christmas. If I don't recognize you or know what holidays you prefer to observe, I may just say Happy Holidays. That isn't a put down of Christmas, or Hanukkah or any other celebration, but rather a recognition that we all celebrate things differently this time of year. Whatever holiday(s) you choose to observe this year, I wish you well and hope you can observe it safely so that we can all be here to celebrate it again next year!