

Gardening with Chuck Programs for February 18 - 24, 2019

Time For Fruit Tree Care

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. If you have home fruit trees, regardless of whether you think that you will get any fruit from them this year or no, late February and March is a critical time to do regular maintenance on those trees. Things like dormant oil treatments, which aren't routinely needed, or treatments for peach leaf curl, listen to tomorrow's program, and pruning all need to be done in the next few weeks. If you take care of your fruit trees starting in the year you plant them and then do that regular maintenance you won't suddenly find yourself with a fruit tree that's totally out of control. Any pruning or spraying needs to be done when temperatures are above 40 degrees and will be there for several hours. Pruning when it is below freezing greatly increases the risk of inadvertent damage from bark tears, plus it's just uncomfortable! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Peach Leaf Curl

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Peach leaf curl is a disease of peach leaves that we have about every year. The fungus infects the tiny leaves just as the buds start to break open in the early spring. You don't see the problem until weeks later when the leaves start to distort and pucker before turning yellow and red and falling off the tree. While the disease won't kill the tree in the short run, it will weaken a tree that isn't long lived anyway, and definitely hurt fruit production IF you are lucky enough to have any peaches on the tree. It is effectively treated with a fungicide containing chlorothalonil BUT it has to be applied before the buds start to swell very much, as in now!! Mix according to label directions and thoroughly cover the tree with spray. I might try to spray it twice about ten days apart. Dormant oils will not work for this disease. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Pruning Fruit Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. The art and science of pruning fruit trees can not be fully explained in the time allotted for this program so I encourage you to pick up one of our brochures or talk to me. But in general, pruning fruit trees is an annual practice that needs to be done to control the size and growth of the tree. You cut out dead branches or branches that are competing for space. You open up the center of the tree to allow better light penetration and also to make it easier to spray the tree. You prune to reduce how much fruit the tree might bear so that the fruits are larger and better quality. Reducing the number of fruit on a tree can also help fight the every other year bearing of many apple trees. If you miss a couple of years you are going to have a mess that will take a couple of years to get fixed, so prune annually. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Pruning Overgrown Fruit Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I routinely get the call from a homeowner that they moved into a new house with an overgrown apple tree, or they planted the tree and just hadn't done anything with it since and now it's a big mess. What do they need to do. Well, in all honesty, if you are serious about fruit production, you are going to cut that tree down and start over. It is honestly going to take 4 to 7 years to get a badly overgrown tree back into good production condition. The amount of time you will spend pruning would be better spent on getting several new trees and spending a little time every spring with them. If you really want to work on it though, give me a call and I'll come out and show you how to do it. Of course, the other option is to just leave the tree alone, do nothing, and treat it like an ornamental tree and let the birds have the fruit. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Start Them When They're Young

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Many people plant a new fruit tree and don't even think about pruning it until it's about five years old. This is a big mistake. I know a lot of fruit trees get planted annually. In year one, plant it, with no fertilizer, and focus on keeping it alive. Don't do any pruning other than to select about three good scaffold branches and remove the others. In year two, cut out branches that are competing with each other - keep the branches that have a 60 to 80 degree angle of attachment. Prune out branches growing down and head back any branches shooting straight up. Remember, you want branches that look like a spiral staircase and keep the interior of the tree opened up so that sunlight and spray can get inside. Fertilize it lightly starting year two with a couple cups of general balanced fertilizer. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.