

Cold Temperatures and Potatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Some of the reasons that potatoes are such a popular starch vegetable is because they can be grown over a wide geographic area, they are prolific producers at 10 to 15 tons per acre, they will also store for extended periods in cold temperatures and lastly, come on, they taste good and are versatile. They do have one potential drawback though. While they can stay firm and last months in cold storage, this cold storage will often cause the starches to convert to sugars. I've run into this before and sweet tasting Irish potatoes are weird. However, this isn't a permanent issue. Two to three days of sitting at room temperature will cause the sugars to convert back to the appropriate starches which will return taste to normal. So keep the majority of your spuds in the fridge but a day or two worth at room temperature. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Grow Your Own Christmas Greenery

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. People like to use all sorts of festive greenery at the holidays. Some of these traditions go back hundreds of year to medieval England. If you like using this greenery, consider growing some of it yourself! Holly is a shrub that we can grow fairly well on the east or north side of houses out of southwest winds. You need at least one male shrub for every 5 or 6 female shrubs. Boxwood is another deciduous evergreen that grows well. It's small dark green leaves can make a nice accent. You could also grow some southwestern white pines to trim the foliage off for some pine boughs or make your own swags and garland. Lastly there is mistletoe. Mistletoe is actually a parasitic plant that grows in the tops of trees from southern Kansas south. But I do know of one plant growing on a tree locally, but I'm not telling where! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Holiday Cactus

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Some people call them Christmas cactus, some call them Thanksgiving cactus, and yes they are different species. And they hybridize readily. I just call them holiday cactus and go on from there!

Regardless, these plants are technically epiphytes in their native environment meaning that they use another plant for support but not for nutrients. These plants, like many South American jungle plants, prefer indirect sunlight and just normal household temperatures. Getting them to flower at the right time of year involves a combination of watering and water stress, fertilizing lightly every two weeks until winter and then withholding fertilizer. You can also tweak flowering through temperature and daylight manipulation for 25 days. If you'd like the details, call me at the Extension Office. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Holiday Fruits

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I always joke that the biggest challenge for the holidays is what to do with the fruits and nuts, and I'm not talking about family members. Holiday fruit baskets are a popular gift. In some cases the fruit is gone in short order, but proper storage will stretch out how long it'll stay good. Unpack and separate the fruits. Tree fruits like apples, pears, grapefruit and oranges will store best at around 40 degrees either in the refrigerator or an attached unheated garage. Tropical fruits, except for those citrus fruits, and this includes bananas, need to be stored at room temperature and used fairly soon after receiving as they simply are more perishable with shorter storage life. The tree fruits and citrus fruits can usually be expected to store 3 to 4 weeks at that 40 degree range, without shriveling or losing crispness. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Holiday Nuts

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Yesterday it was holiday fruits, today it is holiday nuts! We often think of nuts as being long storage life produce but you need to remember that they are high in oils and oils can go rancid. If you've never bit into a nut that's gone rancid, you're lucky! While it's handy to have a nut bowl out where you have easy access, you're better off to keep the nuts in the refrigerator or freezer, either shelled or unshelled to reduce water loss. The more water that the nuts loses the more quickly they will go rancid. You can store them shelled or unshelled but shelled will take up less space. Put them in a plastic container with a tight fitting lid or a resealable plastic bag. This will keep them from absorbing flavors from other foods. While they will store in the freezer for up to a year, quality is best if they are used in six months. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.