

Gardening with Chuck Programs for January 6 - 12, 2020

Just Because it's New, It May Not Be Better

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. In November the 2020 All America winners for plants were announced. In the coming weeks I'll be talking about these selections because gardeners have interest in them. But just because something is new, it doesn't always make it better. There are three AAS winners this year that are regional winners, but not for our region. Even if a variety was named a national winner it may not be well suited to your particular garden. I always like to plant 80 to 90% of my garden to what I've known has worked before and leave that 10 to 20% to play and have fun whether it be a new cultivar, one I've just never heard of or an heirloom I want to compare to. So as the seed catalogs start showing up at your house proceed with restraint and caution. If questions arise, give me a call and I'll check my sources. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Forcing Bulbs - Paper Whites

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Often, by the middle of February many of us have had about enough of winter and the lack of things green and blooming. You can go to the greenhouse and buy some blooming plants or you can force your own bulbs. For most of those you needed to start several months ago to have blossoms in February. But one, paper white narcissus don't need the cold treatment period. If you can find some paper white bulbs (should be available online) you can plant them in a pot with a little soil or just some medium gravel, start watering them, keep them at room temperature and in 4 to 6 weeks you should have blooms. Plant a new pot every week for a few weeks for an extended bloom time. A word of warning though as some folks find the fragrance not at all pleasant so proceed with caution if you do this! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Eagle Days

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. The annual Milford Lake Eagle Days will be Saturday, January 25th this year. But let's be clear that you can go out to Milford Lake virtually any day and have no problem seeing Bald Eagles. Eagle Days is an event that's headquartered at the Milford Nature Center below the dam at Milford Lake.

There are educational programs all day. There are bus trips every half hour from 9 to 2 to view Bald Eagles. And it's all free thanks to the volunteers and sponsors. I've been out there virtually every year helping and the one thing that many people get confused is that just because an eagle doesn't have a white head and tail, that doesn't make it a Golden Eagle. Bald Eagles don't get their white head and tail until they are full adults at 4 years of age. Golden Eagles are actually quite rare around Geary County. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Where Are The Birds?

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. In recent weeks I have been asked, a lot, why there aren't any birds at homeowner's bird feeders. I think a lot of this has been heightened awareness of declining bird populations from major press releases back in September. There are fewer birds and that may be part of the reason. But a lot of it comes down to what is happening in your region. We had good rainfall last summer and that created a lot of cover and a lot of natural food supplies. Other than a couple of times we haven't had much snow and this has allowed birds to stay out feeding on natural sources. As winter continues I'd expect more birds to show up at your feeders. Bird populations are dynamic. The challenges and threats facing birds are many. You may want to consider improving your backyard habitat and keeping your cat inside to help. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Bird Seed Preferences

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Nationwide, it is calculated that people spend over \$4 billion on feeding birds. It is a big business and sadly many people waste money buying bird seed that birds will likely ignore and waste. Homeowners often buy a bird seed mix that is pound for pound the cheapest. The problem is that much of that mix will be ignored by the very birds they want to attract. If you have the standard hanging bird feeder just buy straight black oil sunflower seeds and keep it filled. The birds feeding at these feeders don't want millet, milo, wheat or cracked corn. They want high oil, high energy foods like sunflower seeds. If you want to feed millet, wheat, milo, cracked corn type mixes, put it at ground level or on a low feeder just inches off the ground. That's where the birds that eat those grains prefer to feed. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.