

Gardening with Chuck Programs for February 1 - 7, 2021

Time For First Seedings

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. One of the ways we gardeners deal with winter is to start our own transplants from seed. This involves planning to make sure that the transplants are the right size when it's the right time to transplant. For all of you tomato lovers, yeah, we're still about two months off. BUT, get your light frame set up, your greenhouse trays full of A-24 seedling starter inserts, your soil less mix and then we can get going. If you hurry there's still time to get onion plants started. If you've never started your own onions from seed before, contact me first for a few hints and tricks. Beyond that you can start your lettuce now - and also all the cole crops including cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower. It takes these about 8 weeks to be transplantable which will get you into the late March, early April time frame, right on target! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Throw the Old Seed Away

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Okay, we can admit it - gardeners are packrats. They'll have old seed packages around with one seed in them, or they found some on clearance for 90% off and bought them last August. You go to any avid gardeners home and start sorting through there supplies and you'll find so many packages of seeds and I'll bet you that some of them are old enough to vote! Come on gardeners, it's time to clean house and throw them, all of those old seeds, away. For starters, unless you had perfect conditions, seed viability drops way off after just a couple of years. Secondly, for most gardeners seeds aren't that big of an expense. Lastly, they wind up being nothing but bait for insect and vermin you don't want in your storage areas. So gather all those seed packets up and start getting rid of them. Support the seed industry! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

What Size Fruit Tree?

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When homeowners decide to plant fruit trees they are faced with the challenge of getting a standard size tree, a semi-dwarf or a dwarf tree. There is an inclination to go straight to the dwarf tree. Dwarf trees will generally be less than 50% the size of a standard tree and start bearing in 3 to 4 years compared to 5 to 7 years for a standard sized tree. The problem is that dwarf fruit trees also have much smaller root systems and are often prone to being tipped over by strong winds especially when soils are wet. Often we are better off to get a semi-dwarf fruit tree. Yes they are a little bigger, usually 70% the size of a standard tree. They do start bearing a little quicker, 4 to 5 years, and have a much better root system. Whatever size fruit tree you buy prune, it annually to help keep the size under control. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Can I Graft My Own Apple Tree?

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Virtually all apple trees are grafted. Since apples are open pollinated, if you plant the seeds of an apple you like, you won't get exactly like the parent fruit. In fact, there's about a 1 in 80,000 chance of getting something as good as the original fruit. So we graft. Grafting is a bit of an art form and a bit science but it is one way to get a tree just like what bore the fruit you liked so well. We graft trees in late winter or very early spring. You need a rootstock, which could be a tree you already have or a new root stock, and then scion or scion wood which is from the tree you want to clone. If you are interested in trying this, I'll be happy to send you some information on it. Keep in mind however that many new and popular apple cultivars are protected by patents and using one of them as a scion is technically illegal. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Multiple Apple Species on One Tree?

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. We've all seen the advertisements in plant catalogs or in the Sunday newspaper for 5 in 1 apple trees. You plant one tree and you can get five different types of apples. If you read the advertisements it sounds like these are the best thing since sliced bread. While they are good in theory, in reality, these are the issues I've seen. Unless careful and aggressive annual pruning is done, one or two of the cultivars will become dominant. Each species has a slightly different bloom time and even cold weather tolerance. I've seen several of these trees where 2 or 3 of the cultivars have simply died out. These are usually dwarf apple trees so the total number of fruit you get of any one cultivar is seldom more than a dozen or so mature apples. Honestly, you'd be better off in the long run to plant a couple of different apple trees! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.