

The Wind Blows in Kansas

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A week ago we had a great weekend.

Temperatures got up into the 50s, even pushing 60 and then at sundown on Sunday, a cold front blew through and I mean BLEW through. This is the Great Plains folks, the wind blows. Wind is one of the dominant weather features in the plains and has one of the biggest impacts on plant growth. If you find any tree, out in the open, it is misshapen. The limbs on the southwest side are shorter than the limbs on the northeast side and in general the tree probably leans. It is growing in reaction to the prevailing wind that it is subjected to during the growing season. We have many plants that can handle the occasional temperatures over 100 that we regularly have in our summer seasons here, but if these plants are in the full wind, they probably won't survive. Plants lose moisture out of the leaves. As the temperature increases so does the moisture loss. If you start moving air over that leaf, it will lose even more. So when we get those high temperatures, low humidities and windy conditions, the plant loses water from the leaf faster than it can physically move water from the roots and the leaf shows scorch, burn or death. We are heading into the time of year that we will be planting flowers, trees and shrubs. Just because you can buy a plant at a nursery in the area doesn't mean that the plant will thrive in all locations. Ask specific questions about what the plant likes and doesn't like. Find out if it needs protection from summer winds. If the sales staff doesn't know, write down the name and cultivar of the plant and give me a call so I can help! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

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Fruit Plant Winterhardiness

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Winterhardiness is a complex situation and one that is hard for many gardeners to comprehend, especially when it comes to fruit trees. We need to differentiate tree survival from blossom bud survival. Take a peach tree. It can handle wintertime temperatures down to 20 below zero. It will survive and thrive. But the flower buds on that tree are liable to be killed at 5 to 10 below. That assumes that these temperatures occur at maximum winter hardiness or maximum dormancy. Flower buds are made one time a year, generally late summer. The fruit tree blossoms that show up this spring were made in August of last year. We had good conditions to make flower buds. Leaf buds can be generated multiple times during a year. If the flower buds get killed, that's it for that year. If the tree leafs out and gets frozen, the tree will make new leaves fairly soon. The next fly in the ointment is that once the plant starts to break dormancy and move water, sap, to the buds, they start to lose dormancy and they can't go backwards. Once those flower buds start to swell, all of a sudden we start to see bud death at 15 or 20 degrees above instead of five below. Homeowners make the problem worse by placing fruit trees on the south side of a house or windbreak where they will warm up earlier than other areas. They think they are protecting the tree from cold winter winds, but they are setting it up for disaster. So if you are planting new fruit trees you want to pick a location that has good summer sun, and is one of the last places that the snow melts in the spring! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Bird Feeding

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Backyard bird feeding has grown in popularity exponentially in the past 20 years. If you don't think so, just check out the stacks of bird feed at many stores around the area. What used to be a past time of bird watchers and Sr. Citizens is now a mainstream activity with people putting up lots of feeders and then putting internet webcams on them so everyone gets to watch. I often receive a lot of calls from homeowners concerned that they aren't seeing birds at their feeders and worried about what's going on. Part of it is time of year. We are just now moving deep enough into winter that native food supplies are getting used up and birds are relying more and more on feeders. I often feel that maximum activity at my feeders is going to occur in late March and most of April. But there probably is more than that going on. The drought of 2011 and 2012 did impact bird populations, especially birds that are here year round like goldfinches. So populations have been reduced by one of our natural cycles. The better growing season of 2013 then also supplied more natural feed that the birds have been making use of. Lower numbers of winter birds were noted on Christmas Bird Counts conducted in Kansas during December and early January. Number of species was down about 12% and overall numbers of individuals appears to have been down 20 to 30% over the past few years. So yes, there are fewer birds around this year and the reason is most likely the weather. But keep those bird feeders filled, use a heated birdbath and you should start seeing more birds in coming weeks! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

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