

Pets and yourself in the cold weather

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One thing that I've noticed about a lot of gardeners is that many of them have pets or they appreciate animals, wildlife and feed the birds. Winter weather, like we've been having recently is touch on all creatures. The plants are handling it pretty good so far, but it is stressful for non-hibernating critters. While most animals, both domestic and wild are pretty well equipped for winter weather, there's a few things we need to keep in mind for them and for us to make sure we get through it unscathed. While cold is a critical factor of winter weather, wind is the brutal taskmaster of bone-chilling cold. And since this is Kansas, we will have wind. Any creature, a dog, a cat, a cow or a cardinal can handle the cold weather much better if there is some way to get out of the wind. For birds, establish plantings of evergreens to provide that winter shelter. Even putting the old Christmas tree under the feeders in the backyard can provide protection. For dogs, give 'em a doghouse and lots of fresh dry straw. If you have a pet that is an indoor pet, they aren't going to be prepared as well, so keep them indoors as much as possible. All creatures need water anytime of the year so make sure heated water for pets or birds is available. Eating snow is a last ditch effort by creatures to meet water needs and it takes valuable energy to melt that snow and warm it up. Finally, make sure that you are bundled up and protected from the wind and cold when you are out taking care of your animal friends. It doesn't take long to get chilled and that weakens you and your immune system! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Firewood choices

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With the cold winter weather we've been having I've been smelling a lot of wood smoke in the air from fireplaces and wood stoves. Firewood species selection always causes a lot of confusion and shall we say interesting discussion. You see, all wood has the same amount of BTU's, or heat energy per pound of wood. Now before you tell me I'm crazy, remember I said per pound of wood. Different tree species have different bulk densities so it takes a lot bigger pile of wood to make a pound of some trees. Because wood can have varying moisture contents we don't talk about firewood in weight, but in volume, hence the measurements of a cord, a face cord or a rick. Oak is the standard that we seem to measure all firewood performance by. Bur Oak comes in at about 25 million BTU's per cord. There's even some variation in types of oak. Red oak is a little less, post oak a little more. Black locust, honey locust and hedge all have more BTU's than oak but keep in mind that hedge sparks badly and you don't want to use it in a fireplace and black locust is really difficult to split. Some fairly common trees, out in the timber, hackberry, Siberian elm and American elm really aren't too bad when it comes to heat production. They come in at 80 to 85% as much heat output as oak, but the two elms can be a trick to split. Speaking from experience, split elm as soon as possible after you cut it, or it becomes a real pain to split. Hackberry is the highest of those three and it splits really nicely. Surprisingly, black walnut isn't that much better than hackberry, and takes longer to dry. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

How big of a garden

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Let's talk about garden size because a common mistake is to tackle too big of a garden. A garden 25 by 50 feet may not sound very big, until it's the middle of July and you are trying to stay ahead of the weeds and keep up with the watering. If you are a novice gardener, start with a garden no bigger than 400 square feet or 20 by 20. The next critical step is to pick up a copy of the K-State Extension bulletin called Vegetable Garden Planting Guide. This has great tables to tell you how much space you need for each crop and how much you need to plant per person. It also has a wonderful calendar to help you know when to plant and when you can expect to harvest. For example, figure 3 to 5 tomato plants per person and allow 9 to 12 square feet per tomato plant. So if there's two of you in your household and you are planting 40 or 50 tomato plants, I hope you have a plan of what you are going to do with all those tomatoes. Sweet corn and small gardens just don't go together. Go and buy it from someone who plants it by the acre. You can call me up to find out why! You like green beans? 15 feet of row per person, for two of you, that's 30 feet of green beans. But don't plant them all at once, plant ten foot rows, ten days apart and spread your harvest out over more time, OR plan to freeze or can some. Onions? 5 feet of row per person. Potatoes, okay, 50 feet of row per person for a year' supply. But if you take your time and lay out your garden, you can get a lot of produce out of not a lot of space. All it takes is planning... well, then planting and weeding and watering.. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.