

Keep The Tree Watered

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We're into that home stretch of Christmas, then New Years and then most real Christmas trees will be out of the house. The problem is that this is also a time when trees are often ignored and can become a very dangerous fire hazard. A tree that is regularly watered will stay much fresher and hydrated if you will. If the water level has dropped below the bottom of the tree trunk for any length of time the tree has probably lost it's ability to take up water and is now drying out rapidly and it's flammability is increasing daily. It is a bonfire waiting to happen. The species of trees that we use for Christmas trees have very resinous sap. This sap is present throughout all parts of the tree. In it's purest form, this resinous sap is basically turpentine, a highly flammable product. When a tree is well hydrated, the presence of water keeps the resin diluted and much less flammable. As the tree dries out, the resin becomes the predominant component left and can quickly turn into a blow torch. If a Christmas tree catches fire, do not try to extinguish the fire, get everyone out of the house as quickly as possible. Hopefully you have been keeping your tree well watered. I check the water in my tree stand every morning and evening and every morning and evening I am adding water. If your tree has quit taking up water, that is a danger sign and I would try to get it out of the house as soon after Christmas as possible. Don't leave lights lit on a tree if you are going to be gone and never ever use open flames or a heat source, or frayed or damaged lights on or near a tree. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Trees After Christmas

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Once the season has passed and the Christmas tree has been undecorated, what the heck are you going to do with it? There is an all too unfortunate mindset in many folks that we'll just put it out with the trash. The problem is that a left over Christmas tree has too much value to just be treated as "trash". Being an evergreen, all those resins in the sap do not make it a good choice to be burned up in the fireplace or wood stove. However you can let it dry and then split up the trunk or clip off the branches and make some dandy kindling wood. When the Otte's take down their Christmas tree on New Year's Day, it goes out around the bird feeders in the back yard where the birds will use it for shelter for the winter months. When that pesky Sharp-shinned Hawk comes winging through the backyard, the birds find it very comforting to dive into that fir tree out of sight and out of reach of those lethal talons. When those cold winter winds blow, the birds can likewise burrow into those evergreen boughs reducing the wind chill. Some people cut the branches off their old Christmas tree and use them as mulch and protection over semi-hardy perennials. If you have a pond you can tie concrete blocks to it and sink it for fish habitat. However, if all you want is the tree gone, there is another option. Again this year Geary County Fish and Game Association will be collecting trees for wildlife habitat. Remove ALL decorations from the tree first. Then they will be collected in the vacant lot on the northeast corner of Jackson and 14th Streets. There should be a sign posted soon! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Go Easy on the Ice Melters

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As we have already seen this season, in most winters, we will usually have ice and snow in Kansas anytime from November through early April. Ice and snow, by their nature are, shall we say, low friction compounds. In other words, you slide around on them. When you're in your vehicle on snow and ice it's one thing, but when you are walking on snow and ice, you face different risks. The older I get the more aware I am of the potential problems of taking a spill on ice. So I totally understand the desire to get snow and ice removed from your sidewalks and driveway. However, it is also good to understand how these deicers work and potential impact they can have on landscaping materials. Most commonly used deicers are some kind of salt based. Salty water has a lower freezing point than non-salty water. You apply a deicer, it reacts with the water in the snow or ice and starts to melt the frozen water. Salts, especially in excess, can damage soil and ultimately vegetation. Evergreens that have had salty slush splashed up on them from the street can show burn symptoms, sometimes months later. In many cases, the best approach is to let sunshine after the storm work it's magic. If you do use deicers, use them sparingly and give them time to work. A little bit can go a long ways if you are patient. Yes, you can also used nitrogen based fertilizers, but keep in mind that these are still salt based, and excess can cause problems for plant materials. I totally understand the need to use deicers, but for your plant's sake, go easy on them, be patient and just let them work! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.