

Christmas Tree Selection and Care

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Within the next two weeks there will be a lot of real Christmas trees purchased and set up in homes. Mine will be arriving from North Carolina via UPS next week, so I'm in that camp too! A real Christmas tree is a beautiful thing to see and smell, but it can also be a major fire hazard. The minute the tree is cut off the stump, it starts to dry out and die. The drier it gets the greater the fire risk becomes. Therefore, we need to focus on keeping the tree as fresh as possible. We accomplish this by buying as fresh a tree as possible and then providing it with as much water as it needs. My tree is cut, boxed and shipped all in the same day. I receive it 3 to 4 days later and it is very fresh. If you go direct to a Christmas Tree farm, you cut it down at the time and it is even fresher. If you buy one at a lot, it's hard to know how long ago it was cut. If you see one that looks good, give it a good sharp thump on ground. If a lot of needles fall off, put it back. If a lot don't fall off, take a needle and bend it. If it bends well before breaking, it's fairly fresh. When you get the tree home, get it up in the stand and in water ASAP. Get the stand ready and before you bring the tree in to place it in the stand, take a saw and cut off the bottom half inch or so of the trunk. The sap tends to seal up the vessels in the trunk soon after it is cut. By cutting off that half inch slice you open those tubes back up and the tree can take up water. Check the water 3 or 4 times a day the first week and add water regularly the whole time it is in the house. Then decorate it and enjoy the look and smell of it the rest of the season! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.

Poinsettia Care

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I like poinsettias. They have a wonderful history as a Christmas time plant, from a botanical point of view their flowering cycle is fascinating, and a well cared for poinsettia is just a beautiful thing. If you think that poinsettias are just these stupid big old plants with red petals, you haven't seen the many new varieties out there. Just to straighten out one misconception, the actual flower of a poinsettia is the small thing in the very center. All those big colored "petals" are actually leaves or more correctly, modified bracts. The many new varieties have an incredible range of colors and size and would jazz up any holiday home. Just a few care considerations about poinsettias. They are a tropical plant and don't like cold weather. Protect them from cold air when you take them home. Place them in an area away from cold drafts but not near a furnace warm air duct. Often the pot the poinsettia is in will be wrapped with that shiny decorative foil. Make sure you have a saucer to put the pot on and punch holes in the foil on the bottom so water can drain out. Poinsettias are very sensitive to over and under watering. Water when the soil surface is dry to the touch. If you over water the plant, it will get root rot and die. If the plant wilts, even if you water it as soon as you see it, the leaves will fall off. If you want to try to keep the plant alive and get it to re-bloom next year, stop by the Extension Office and pick up our bulletin on Poinsettias. Personally, I like to enjoy my poinsettia well into the new year, then pitch it out and buy a new one. The industry depends on people like me! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

Otte.

Holiday Greenery

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many homeowners enjoy having holiday greenery around their house. Perhaps it's a fir wreath on the front door. Maybe it's a pine foliage swag coming down the stair bannister. Perhaps it's just a few branch tips around the base of the poinsettia on the mantle or the coffee table. But they love the greenery! Here's my tip for holiday greenery in the house. As much as I love the real stuff, buy artificial to use in the house. All of these species that we use for Christmas trees and greenery are loaded with resins that are highly flammable. Once these items are cut from the root system, they start to dry down. Flammability increases rapidly as water content in the plant decreases. With a real Christmas tree we at least have the ability to slow down this drying out process by making sure that it is regularly watered. With greenery, we just don't have that ability. Our homes tend to have very low humidity and as such, the greenery dries out even faster. Outside the home, like a wreath on the front door, I'm not quite as concerned as the cooler weather will slow the drying out process and there's also less fire risk. But inside the house I would be very careful using real greenery. Do not use it around any kind of heat source like a candle and don't put it on top of a fire place mantle. Wait as long as possible to decorate and then get the greenery out of the house as soon after Christmas as practical. If you want to have real greenery in the house for an extended period, replace it periodically through the month of December. I want you to enjoy the holidays, but please be safe!

This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.