

Go Easy on the Ice Melt

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Last week was our first reminder that in most winters, we will usually have ice and snow anytime from now 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.

Safety with fresh 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.

Preventing Mouse Damage to Fruit Trees and Landscape Plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Mice love to eat the tender bark off of young fruit trees especially but really off of many different trees. This usually happens later in the winter and usually requires enough snow on the ground to cover up their typical food sources. What the mice like to do is to burrow up from below and then hide in the weeds and grass that often are around the base of trees and snack away on the bark on the lower trunk and even the larger roots just below ground level. The damage can be severe enough as to kill the tree! Mice and even some of our native rat species, will also feed higher on thin barked trees and shrubs. If you've ever seen areas 2 feet off the ground or higher that are stripped of bark, that's what rodents will do. First of all, clear away any weeds and grass that are around the base of the trees. Don't use a weed eater as you can damage bark with that too, but get down and pull it away and get it out of there. Additionally, if your trees are mulched, make sure that the mulch does not touch the tree. Never ever pile up mulch like a volcano around trees. It should look like a doughnut of mulch with the mulch stopping an inch or two from the base of the tree. If you start to see little holes in the ground then this will indicate mouse activity. Don't start tossing poison around as this can be eaten by beneficial non-target wildlife. You can put a baited mousetrap (I prefer to use cheap oily peanut butter for bait) inside a piece of PVC pipe big enough in diameter to allow the trap to spring and long enough, like 12 to 18 inches, so pets can't get into it. Then check the traps daily!

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Can you keep old garden seed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many gardeners, and I fall into this category, are reluctant to throw anything away, including old garden seed. Some seeds will last for several years if you keep them from getting too hot. If most seeds are kept cool and in the dark, they can last for about three years. However, plants in the carrot family, which includes things like carrots, parsnips and parsley, are short lived and will only last about a year or two. Here's the bottom line as far as I'm concerned. Most gardeners aren't buying that much seed nor is it that expensive. When it gets to the end of the year, now, throw it out. If you run across some old seed packets in the garage, throw them out. Most garages get hot enough in the summertime that the germination of those seeds will have been badly damaged. By the way, most seed packets are stamped with something such as, "Packaged for 2016". Look close and you may be surprised how old some of that seed really is! If you happen to buy a lot of seed of some hard to find cultivar, then you need to take steps to keep that seed safe and viable. Perhaps the best way to do that is to put packets of seed inside a re-sealable plastic bag and put it in the refrigerator. But mark it well first. If you come across a large batch of seed you can test it for viability. Place ten seeds on a paper towel moistened with warm water. Roll the paper towels up and place it inside a plastic bag with a few holes for air exchange and then place it in a warm place like on top of the refrigerator. Moisten the towel as needed and start checking for germination on a weekly basis. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Controlling Volunteer Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. While the recent cold weather has pretty well ended most yard and garden activities, there are still a few things that you can do. One of those is controlling volunteer trees. I'm sure many of you have cut off a volunteer tree only to have it sprout back up a few weeks later. With the exception of cedar trees, very few trees will actually die just by cutting them off at the ground. If the tree is small you can dig it up by the roots. If it's a tree of any size you can cut and cut and cut, but ultimately you will probably have to use a little herbicide. The good news is that unlike foliar herbicide treatments that obviously won't work this time of year, cut stump treatments can be applied throughout the winter season. While some folks want to use Tordon for cut stump treatments, I really discourage that in yards. Tordon can wash into the soil and be taken up by the roots of desirable plants. You want to use a herbicide that doesn't have soil activity. The best of these is glyphosate or triclopyr. Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Roundup. Triclopyr is often sold as stump and brush killer. All you need to do is to cut off the volunteer tree and right away brush on some of the concentrate herbicide. You don't have to drown the cut surface, just moisten it. You can usually expect about 99% control using this method. One word of caution - do not treat root sprouts with this method as you can kill or damage the main tree. Honeylocust, black locust, hackberry, cottonwood, poplar, willow, and boxelder are all species that readily root sprout that you don't want to use herbicides on. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.