

Starting plants from seed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Based on past observations, most gardeners have usually had enough winter by about the first week of January. Spring fever is already setting in and they have a strong desire to start planting something, NOW! So there they are, the 10th of January and they are already getting plants started for their spring garden. They may suspect that they are a little bit on the early side, but they mistakenly think that they can keep the plants going until it is time to set them out. If you are fortunate to have a small greenhouse attached to your home you may be able to get by with that. But most gardeners don't even have a light frame, they are just starting plants and putting them in a sunny window. You know what the biggest problem most home gardeners have when trying to start their own transplants? Yup, insufficient light intensity. When that happens you wind up with tall skinny plants that fall over. Even a bright window doesn't have adequate light. You need those transplants under multiple fluorescent lights with the lights literally sitting on top of the plants. If you want to start your own vegetable transplants then take the time to know how long it takes to grow those transplants to the appropriate size and when you can set them out. This will help you time things out appropriately. For the record, about the earliest you'd want to start transplants is February 7th, and that would be for cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and lettuce for transplanting on April 4th. For peppers and the ever popular tomato? Put the seed away - you don't want to start those until the end of March!

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Winter 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. With the holidays behind us and finally the arrival of colder weather, it can be a good time to put some bird feeders out in your backyard. Backyard bird feeding is relatively inexpensive and can provide hours of enjoyment for the entire family and bring multiple generations of the family together on cold snowy days to watch the birds come to the feeders! If you have absolutely no landscaping, as in trees, in your yard or your neighbor's yards, you may be hard pressed to attract birds to your back yard. But if you have a few trees of even moderate size, you should have birds visiting your feeders. Some people tend to go a bit overboard with bird feeders but I encourage folks to consider a very simple approach. If you are going to have just one feeder, have a hanging feeder and fill it with black oil sunflower seed. This is the more preferred food of all birds that visit feeders. For a second feeder you may want to get a little wire cage feeder, very inexpensive, that you can put pre-formed suet blocks in. These will attract woodpeckers and nuthatches and many other species in really cold weather. You may also want to consider a ground feeder or just buy one of the bird seed mixes and scatter it on the ground or the edge of the patio to attract doves, juncos and other ground feeding species. There are many other speciality feeds and feeders you can use, but these would be the basics. If you want more information on back yard bird feeding I have several really good bulletins on back yard bird feeding and can even give you some suggestions for some bird books as well! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Paperwhites for winter blooms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It doesn't take too much winter to get us longing for some blossoms in our homes. Many of the spring flowering bulbs can be forced using cold treatment to get blooms in pots, but you really needed to start those back last fall. However, there is one bulb that doesn't need that extensive chilling period to get it to bloom. Paperwhites are a form of daffodil that don't require that chilling treatment. First of all track down some paperwhite bulbs. You may have to order them on line, but they are available. Use a 3 to 4 inch deep decorative container that doesn't have drain holes. Clear glass works great so you can see the water level. Place 1 to 2 inches of washed gravel, glass beads, marbles or stones in the bottom of the container. Place the bulbs on the media and have the bulbs almost touching each other. Then add some more of the media you put in the bottom to help hold the bulbs in place. Add enough water so that just the bottom of the bulb is sitting in water, don't submerge the bulb. Maintain water at this level. It will normally take 4 to 8 weeks for the bulbs to bloom. As they grow it helps to keep them under as bright a light as possible and cooler temperatures, somewhere around 65 would be ideal. Otherwise they can get rather leggy. Another option to keep them short is to wait until you have about an inch of green shoot on the bulbs, then pour off the water and start using a solution of 1 part 70% rubbing alcohol with 11 parts of water. This low alcohol solution will keep the plants growing just fine but keep them about 1/3 shorter than normal. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.