

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.

Is it too late to treat for weeds?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Well, we finally had a good hard freeze. Between that and the somewhat dry weather we've had, the grass is about done growing - guess I should make one more pass with the lawn mower. While most of us are about done with the season, there may be a few folks that just realized that they forgot to treat their lawn for weeds, and lo and behold, there are some out there! So the question is, are we out of luck for applying a fall lawn weed control? If you hurry, maybe not! For herbicides to work, well, the ones like we use on our broadleaf lawn weeds, they have to be actively growing - meaning conducting photosynthesis and the air temperatures need to be above 50 degrees. Most of the broadleaf weeds that we want to control in the fall are pretty hardy and probably are still not dormant. In all honesty we need to have a couple of nights below 20 degrees to really put them to sleep. And more than likely, as we moving on into December, we are going to have several days where we'll have sunny weather and daytime highs above 50 degrees. It's getting late enough that I don't feel comfortable expecting results from granular weed and feed type products. I would want to use a liquid foliar treatment. The products that come in their own hose end sprayer are great for this. You want the temperature to be above 50 degrees because then the weeds are carrying on photosynthesis and will absorb the herbicides and move it into their root zone where it will work slowly over the coming weeks to eliminate all those spring flowers you don't want in your lawn!

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Controlling Bush Honeysuckle

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Bush honeysuckle is a shrubby plant that used to be planted a lot for landscaping and conservation. It has pretty pinkish white flowers in the spring and lots of red berries on it this time of year. It actually made a pretty good wildlife plant as the birds eat the berries readily and therein lies the problem. The birds eat the berries and then plant them all over the place. The plant can be very invasive and needs to be removed from landscapes and especially controlled in wild areas. Unfortunately it is not easily controlled. You can cut it off at ground level and use tordon or triclopyr to treat the freshly cut stump, but if you have a lot of it, that's a lot of work. This time of year we have another option but just like the lawn weeds I was talking about the other day, you need to be ready to move quick on this to be effective. Honeysuckle stays green much later into the fall than most other plants. For the most part it still has green leaves. If it is growing in a wild area, and there's nothing else that still has green leaves on it around it, you can use glyphosate, often sold as roundup but under many different names as well. Glyphosate only works on green vegetation so anything that is dormant won't be affected. Mix up according to label directions, and apply a thorough soaking spray trying to wet as many of the leaves as you possibly can. You want the temperature to be above 50 degrees when you spray and hopefully it will be sunny as this will encourage good uptake of the herbicide. Naturally, be careful in landscape settings as lawn grasses are still green and could be damaged. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck

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Watering 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. It's the first of December. We shouldn't have to be thinking about watering landscape plants. Unfortunately, December through February is our driest time of the year. Even with all the rain that we had in the summer and early fall, it is probably drier than many homeowners realize. Damage to evergreens, especially blue spruces but any plant that keeps its foliage through the winter, can occur. Anytime the temperature at the foliage, or needle if you will, is above freezing, the plant is carrying on photosynthesis. If it's 35 degrees outside, that photosynthesis is occurring very slowly. If it's 50 degrees, it is happening at a much accelerated rate. Photosynthesis needs carbon dioxide from the air and water from the roots. When the root zone, which is much shallower than most folks realize dries out, plants will start to steal water from itself to continue photosynthesis. If this occurs for an extended period of time, the needles in part of the tree dry out and can die. Unfortunately we don't see this right away. It may be well into the spring or early summer before it becomes apparent. By then the damage is done and it's too late to do anything. Anytime that we go 3 or 4 weeks with no significant rainfall (at least one half inch) this time of year, we really need to water the root zone on days when it is above freezing. A slow running open hose works good for this OR a spongy soaker hose. You need to put it out and run it for hours. You can't stand there and spritz some water and make a difference. And any young landscape plant also needs water as well! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Winterizing Strawberry Plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Strawberry plants in a strawberry bed, if properly winterized, can survive some pretty cold weather. I will also add that strawberries in containers need to be moved inside an unheated garage for the winter, or placed out of the wind and covered with a lot of straw. The crown and roots of strawberry plants in containers will get much colder than those in the ground! Back to the strawberry beds! We find better winter survival and better production the following spring when we generously mulch the strawberry bed in the late fall. We really want the ground to cool down and the plants fully dormant before we mulch them as we are mulching to keep them cold and dormant as we are trying to protect them from cold weather. Historically we plan to mulch the strawberry bed right around Thanksgiving, but most year, it has cooled off more by Thanksgiving than it has this year. Given that, we probably need a couple more weeks to really get those plants dormant. A little snow right now or even a day or two of cold nasty rain would be a really good thing. Soil temperatures are still just a little bit too warm. Many different organic mulches have been used over the years for mulching strawberries, but wheat straw is probably the mulch product of choice. Wheat straw is generally fairly readily available, this is the wheat state after all! You want to shake the slabs or slices of wheat straw apart so you aren't just tossing down big heavy chunks. 3 to 4 inches of straw depth would be ideal. Some of this will blow off over the winter. Then don't be in a hurry to remove it next spring. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.