

Gardening Tips for December 26, 2016 - January 1, 2017

Time to start un-decorating

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I know that Christmas JUST got over so I'm not going to be everyone's favorite, but if you have had a real Christmas tree and especially if you were using natural greenery for decorations around your house, it's time to get that stuff out of the house! It's not that I'm a Scrooge and all tired of Christmas already, no it isn't that at all. It's that this stuff is getting pretty dry right now and every day drier that it gets the bigger fire risk it becomes. If you got a real Christmas tree right after Thanksgiving and put it up right away, then it's been up for 30 days. You've also probably noticed that it isn't taking up water nearly as fast as it used to if it ever was taking up water very quickly. One good clue that it is probably time to get your tree out of the house is if the floor underneath it is rapidly becoming covered with needles. Someday I want to do a demonstration of how flammable a Christmas tree really is, after it's been up for 30 days. But in the meantime, just take my word for it - don't even show it a picture of fire! I recently covered several options of what you can do with your Christmas tree OTHER than just pitching it out. I'm not going to go over those again. But if you want to donate it to go to wildlife cover, please remember that the Geary County Fish and Game Association is again collecting old Christmas trees, real Christmas trees that is, at 14th and Jackson. There's a sign posted there. Please remember to fully un-decorate your tree before taking it there. This is for real Christmas trees and real trees only and please, no other yard waste. Let's keep the stack clean! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What Are Dormant Oils and When Do You Use Them?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many home gardeners become confused, sometimes very confused. The most common problem that I run into has to do when talking with homeowners who have peach trees and I tell them to make a dormant season fungicide application to prevent peach leaf curl. So the homeowner goes to the store not knowing the difference between a dormant season fungicide and a crabgrass preventer and likely gets a clerk that isn't much more knowledgeable. They don't see dormant season fungicide on a label anywhere but lo and behold Volck Oil Spray and the words Dormant Season right there on the label. The purchase is made, the homeowner goes home, applies the product and then calls me up when the peach leaves get all distorted in May and June. I'm not going to talk about dormant fungicide sprays, but I am going to talk about the Dormant Oil Spray. Dormant oil is a highly refined heavy oil that can be used very carefully in the growing season but with good success in the dormant season. At spring and summer temperatures you can cause some serious burn to foliage. Dormant oils are used to control mites and scale insects on trees and shrubs. But not all mites and not all scale insects. Spider mites that normally get on tomatoes and other garden plants, yeah, they're overwintering in residue on the ground. Not going to do any good. It is helpful on euonymus scale though. But if you don't have any of these insects, then you are wasting your money. Don't buy and use a dormant oil unless you have a pest that it will control. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Are all tree species the same for firewood?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Firewood is a topic that I have a lot of fun with. You see, all firewood, pound per pound, has the same number of heat units, or BTUs. I can see some of you already rising to hit the bait! If you have a pound of cottonwood and a pound of oak, you're going to have the same BTUs produced when they are burned. The problem comes down to it takes a bigger pile of cottonwood to make a pound than it does of oak! Firewood efficiency is a function of density of the wood. The denser the wood is, the more BTUs you will have in a cord of wood or simply a single log. Oak is our standard but there is variation even among species of oaks - post oak, not common around here, is 6% denser than red oak and bur is sort of in between those two. There are species that are denser than oak. This includes things like honeylocust, black locust and osage orange, a.k.a. hedge. Hedge sparks a lot so should never be used in an open fireplace, but it can crank out a lot of heat in a wood stove. Green ash and mulberry are both quite dense and are good substitutes if you can't find oak. I would issue a warning against moving ash more than a few miles though as this is one way that Emerald Ash borer get's moved and this is a very destructive pest. Siberian, oft called Chinese, Elm is actually denser than American Elm. But at 75 to 80% the density of oak they are a good choice but tough to split. One of my personal favorites, hackberry, is about 85% the density of oak. Even black walnut makes a good firewood and smells great. If you want more info on this, contact me. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Consider some new veggies

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Want to try something wild and crazy in 2017?

Take 10 to 20% of your garden space and dedicate it to some crops you've never grown before or some wildly different varieties than you've tried before. This is a good way to just sort of experiment. I think we often go back to growing the same things again and again because we know what to expect. While this may be good for the bulk of the garden, how are you ever going to learn something new. So have a corner of the garden be the experiment field! Just this fall I learned about Parisian Carrots. Parisian carrots are an heirloom variety that are orange and taste like carrots but look more like radishes, just cute little balls up to an inch across. To grow traditional carrots you need very friable loamy soil. That big taproot needs soil it can move through very easily. Many of our soils have a lot of clay in them and clay just isn't conducive to growing good carrots. These little rascals aren't deep rooted so we don't have to worry about that. And they are shorter season than traditional carrots so you can get them in and out in a hurry and maybe do sequence planting or a fall crop too. One other garden crop that many folks don't try is peas. Peas need to be planted in March or very early April. But even then sometimes we get too much heat too early. A new cultivar I came across recently is a compact pea plant called Patio Pride. You can even plant it in containers with a small trellis to try to get a jump on the season. Harvest generally starts 40 days after sowing so it may give you an earlier crop than traditional peas! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

A Gardener's New Year's Resolutions

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Since I am one, I think it is fair for me to say this. Gardeners are the WORST at keeping their word! Honey, I promise I'm only going to plant four tomato plants this year. Oh, did you think I said four, I meant fourteen. I'm sorry if you thought I said fourteen, what I really said was forty. Okay, you get the picture. So gardeners, more than many others, probably really need New Year's Resolutions. Let's start with those tomatoes - I resolve to not plant any tomatoes outside until after May 1st. Tomatoes do not like cold feet and I've seen a lot of problems in recent years from poor production due to early planting. I resolve to water my lawn no more often than twice a week. Many homeowners with sprinkler systems think that they need to water every single day. And they wind up with a shallowly rooted stand of turf because only the top inch of soil is wet. Water longer and less frequently to have a more resilient stand of grass and fewer problems in the long run. I resolve to keep my lawn mowed as high as I can. I get so tired of people scalping their yards and then complaining that they don't have a good stand of grass. Fescue and bluegrass need long leaf blades to be healthy and competitive. If you want to mow short, plant zoysia or Bermudagrass. Lastly, I resolve to find out for sure what my problem is before I spray anything. I often get called to look at a problem after everything in the garage has been tried. 90% of blind applications, meaning the problem hasn't been identified, will not control the issue. First find out the problem then treat! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.