

How Early Can You Start Gardening

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Warm spells in winter are cruel. There's no other way to say it, they are cruel! Sure, we're only one month into winter so far but each warm spell gets us wishing for gardening weather. Well, I'm here for your stark reality check. In general, we are still about two months away from the start of the gardening season. Yes, I know, you did not want to hear that, but mother nature does not care about our wishes. In this part of Kansas the earliest that we can consistently expect to start gardening is mid March. Remembering that this is when we can start to get those cool season crops in the ground. Things like broccoli, lettuce, potatoes, radishes, peas and turnips. The simple plant truth is that for these plant seeds to germinate and grow or transplants, like the broccoli, to be able to grow, we have to have the two inch soil temperatures around 50 degrees and staying there. What's the 2 inch soil temperature right now? About 35 degrees and a lot of winter to go! IF we have an early warm up you might try to get peas in the ground the very end of February. OR plant some of the newer dwarf peas, like Patio Pride, in large containers that you can move outside on warm days, but back in to a bright location on cold days. Another trick that the old timers used to use was cold frames. These were frames with glass windows on top put out in warm sunny locations. The soil would heat up faster and plants could get an early start. The new variation on this is hoop houses or even mini hoop houses. If you want more information on these techniques, contact me at the extension office. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Shumard Oak

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Oaks are a mystery to many people. There is an unfortunate misconception that all oaks grow very slow. If you could plant an oak tree today and in 20 years it'd be 30 feet tall, would that be fast enough for you? If not, then we need to talk!

The Shumard Oak is a native to eastern Kansas and is in the Red Oak family. While it is found naturally growing along river bottoms or rocky hillsides next to creeks and streams, it is an amazingly tolerant tree with moderate growth rate. Unlike northern red oak which isn't that fond of heavier clay soils, the Shumard Oak is quite tolerant of clay soils, just don't drown it though. It is similar in appearance to the red oak being loosely pyramidal in form. The tree can grow to 80 feet in height with a 50 foot spread. It can serve as a windbreak tree or a yard shade tree. It is considered to have a moderate to rapid growth rate so once it is established (3 or 4 years) you can expect 2 to 3 feet of growth per year. It can have big leaves, 4 to 8 inches long and 3 to 6 inches wide with a fairly typical red oak shape. It reaches maturity at 20 to 25 years of age at which time it will start producing acorns. Acorns are typically 1 inch long and ½ to 1 inch wide. Much smaller than those massive acorns of bur oaks. Some of the red oak family, like pin oak, has problems with iron chlorosis in higher pH soils. Shumard oak does not seem to have this problem and will do well in western Kansas as well. It has very high value for wildlife, and medium drought tolerance. For maximum growth potential water regularly in dry weather. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Starting onions 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. One thing that most gardeners don't do is to grow onions from seed. I think part of the reason is that somewhere along the line they tried just planting them in the garden when you would normally plant onion sets or plants and then they failed miserably. The problem is that onion seeds need warm soils to germinate but grow best when growing conditions are a bit cooler. So what you need to do is to start your own onion plants indoors and then transplant them out to the garden in late March and early April. One advantage to starting your own onion plants from seed is that you can get some of the named varieties that may be tough to get otherwise. Cost? Well cost is all over the board and can range from less than two cents per seed clear up to 33 cents per seed for things like Texas Super Sweet. It's going to take 6 to 8 weeks to grow your own transplants to the size that they need to be for successful transplanting so starting now is necessary. Plant the seed 1/2 to 3/4 inch deep in a pot or flat filled with a soil less seed starting mix. Place this in a warm location, 75 to 80 degrees until the young seedlings emerge and then move to a cooler location, preferably in the mid 60s. Use fluorescent lights right on top of the seedlings to keep them from growing too tall. Start fertilizing when the seedlings are 2 to 3 inches tall. Once the seedlings are 4 to 5 inches tall start trimming the ends of the leaves to develop stockier transplants. Start hardening off the plants in early March by moving them outdoors, but bring them back in if it gets cold and plant in late March. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

How not to grow a good tree

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Homeowners seem to have an addiction to great lawns. They spend hours of time on their lawns and then as an afterthought they realize, gee maybe I should plant a tree! So they plop a tree down in their yard and go back to focusing all their attention on the lawn. Five years later the tree is still just sort of sitting there like it was plopped down and if it hasn't died, the homeowner starts wondering why it isn't growing very much. I like to tell folks that trees are trees and turf is turf. They each need different management to thrive! One of the biggest competitors with young trees is, turf. Lawn grasses have this massive root system that is sitting above the tree roots in the soil profile. So we plant the tree and then try to get the grass right back up next to the trunk. And we mow close to the young tree, oops just bumped the trunk there - well, it'll be alright. Then we do the quick trim down of the grass right at the tree trunk with the line trimmer - afterall, it's just a piece of plastic line, it won't hurt. And then we wonder why the tree isn't growing well. First of all, when you plant the tree, eliminate all grass within three feet of the trunk of the tree. In that turf free area put down some kind of organic mulch. And keep that zone grass free. Lawn sprinklers aren't necessarily good for trees as they may very well not be applying enough water, or you are drowning the tree. Push a screwdriver down around the tree. If you can't, it's dry, if you can with no problem, you're drowning the tree. Finally, don't use any fertilizer for the first two years and then sparingly after that! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Disease Resistant American Elms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If you go back and look at photos of Junction City prior to about 1970 you will find streets and parks lined with American elms. Then the Dutch Elm Disease arrived in the 1970s and pretty well wiped out the American elms. These stately trees were native and beautiful and fairly strong. For many of us American elms are the tree we picture in our mind when we think of the perfect yard tree or street tree. We still have American elms around, even some big ones. Most of these are not what I'd call truly resistant to Dutch Elm Disease, they are just lucky escapes. Every year I see a few more of the remaining trees contract the disease and die. Over the years there have been American Elms around the country that have not died that have had samples taken from them and tissue cultured into new trees and tested for true resistance. A National Elm Trial was started quite a few years ago, testing some of these trees that appeared to be resistant. The John Pair Horticultural Center near Wichita was one of the evaluation sites. These elms were evaluated for Dutch Elm Disease resistance, damage by other insect pests, mainly lace bug and elm flea weevil, a new pest just showing up in Kansas, as well as storm breakage as well as overall form and habit. Four true American elms, meaning not a hybrid with another elm, showed good disease and insect resistance, good storm damage resistance and acceptable growth habits. Topping the list were Valley Forge and Princeton. Slightly lower ranking was New Harmony and Lewis and Clark. All would be good elms to plant! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.