

Gardening with Chuck for December 11 - 17, 2017

Water those evergreens

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The temperatures are finally getting closer to where they should be at this time of year. But unfortunately, the last precipitation that amounted to anything was almost 2 months ago. This is not a good thing for your landscape evergreens, especially the spruces and pines. To make matters even worse, the temperatures during that dry two month period have been significantly above normal. The combination of these two factors means that during the past two months those evergreens have been carrying on a significant amount of photosynthesis and photosynthesis uses water. If the plant doesn't have any soil moisture to use for photosynthesis it will steal water from itself. Evergreens don't show moisture stress by wilting. In fact, you don't know that an evergreen is under moisture stress, until the damage is already done. If you haven't already in the past couple of weeks, you need to take advantage of upcoming warmer days, meaning afternoon highs over 40 degrees, to hook up the garden hose and soak the soil underneath those evergreens. An open hose running slow, about the size of your finger, left to run for several hours, under the drip line, will be very helpful. If you can, move it around a couple of times, but let it run for a couple of hours. Don't waste time with those root waterers. They generally put the water below the critical root zone and can also blast open voids to cause later problems. I'd do spruces first and then pines. Junipers and arborvitae are not as sensitive, but if you have the time I'd give them a good soaking too to keep them healthy! 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 cooler weather has pretty well ended many 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 are glyphosate and 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.

Can you save and use 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 2017". 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.

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Preventing mouse and vole damage to trees

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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Hollies in Kansas

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. For many folks, thanks to all those Christmas carols, the December holidays invoke visions of the deep green leaves and bright red berries of holly. So periodically, folks think it would be fun to have a holly plant in their home landscape. There are many many different species of hollies, and most of them are not very fond of Kansas weather. They don't like our cold winters, they don't like our soil pH and they don't like our heat and drought. Well that pretty well sums it up. BUT there are some options. American Holly is a medium sized tree that IF you can find it, will probably do pretty well. Inkberry holly may be our most reliable with great foliage, but as it's name implies, the berries are black. Deciduous Holly has bright red berries, but loses it's leaves. We may be on the northwest edge of it's range. Winterberry holly has large red berries but again, loses it's leaves in the winter. Most of the hollies that folks try to grow are actually a hybrid holly known as Meserve Hybrid hollies. Such classics as Blue Prince or Princess or Blue Boy and Blue Girl are examples of this. I have a couple of these on the east side of my house, to protect from heat and drought, and they have done fairly well although the female was hit hard in 2011 and 2012 by the heat and drought. Notice I said female - most of these hollies and hybrids have have separate male and female plants. Usually one male plant per 4 or 5 female plants is more than adequate to get pollination. Make sure you know what you are getting and which sex it is. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.