

Holiday Cactus

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Some people call them Christmas cactus, some call them Thanksgiving cactus and others, because of when they bloom call them what ever holiday is close by. So I tend to refer to them as holiday cactus. For the record, there are two different species here. Christmas cactus and Thanksgiving cactus are two separate species that are native epiphytes to the jungles of South America. Epiphytes are plants that grow on some other plant for support but don't get their water or nutrients from the host plant. Epiphytes are very common in tropical jungles. To tell them apart, just remember that Thanksgiving cactus have hook like appendages on each stem segment while Christmas cactus have smooth stem segments. Like many plants, especially tropical plants, getting them to bloom is usually a combination of daylength and temperature. As epiphytes they like bright, but indirect light. Soil needs to be kept moist but not waterlogged. To get them to bloom, which they will normally do in the fall, they need temperatures between 50 and 70 at night and at least 12 hours or more of darkness. They aren't quite as sensitive as poinsettias but simply putting them in an unused room often works or putting a box over them will do the trick. 25 consecutive nights of conditions like this will initiate bud formation and they should be blooming in 9 to 10 weeks. As we move into late winter, blooming will generally decline. Continue to fertilize lightly every other week. If you can, move them outside in the summer in a shady, but bright location. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What to do with fruits and nuts at the holidays

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When my parents were kids growing up (keep in mind we're talking the 1920s here) citrus fruit in the middle of the country was a luxury at any time of the year and an extra special treat at Christmas time. They always got an orange in their Christmas stocking and they continued that tradition as my siblings and I were growing up. Now days we just expect to go to the store and buy just about any fruit at anytime of the year. None the less, fruits and nuts are popular gifts at Christmas. Fruit baskets and collections of nuts are commonly given. It just isn't December if I don't have a small bowl of nuts, in the shell, to occasionally wrestle open with a nutcracker and enjoy! If you receive fruits or nuts you first need to realize that you aren't going to be able to probably eat all of it in a few days. Fruit is highly perishable. Pome fruits, like apples and pears can go in the refrigerator. Tropical fruits, like pineapples, bananas, etc, probably need to be used as soon as possible as they really don't refrigerate well at all. Citrus fruit storage life can be extended a week to ten days in the refrigerator, but don't try to push them too far. Apples and pears, can stay in the fridge for several weeks, but try to get them utilized within 15 to 20 days. Nuts are a better situation. While their high oil content causes them to go rancid quickly at room temperature, they do store well in the refrigerator and even better in the freezer. They will tend to absorb any other flavors so keep them, shelled or unshelled, in tightly fitting plastic containers or even heavy re-sealable plastic bags. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Firewood all has the same heat output

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 difference 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, 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.

Deicers and vegetation

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. While we haven't seen much the past two years, we still need to be ready! It's now winter and snow can happen! Ice and snow, by their nature are, shall we say, low friction compounds. In other words, you slide around on them. When you're in your vehicle on snow and ice it's one thing, but when you are walking on snow and ice, you face different risks. The older I get the more aware I am of the potential problems of taking a spill on ice. So I totally understand the desire to get snow and ice removed from your sidewalks and driveway. However, it is also good to understand how these deicers work and potential impact they can have on landscaping materials. Most commonly used deicers are some kind of salt. Salty water has a lower freezing point than non-salty water. You apply a deicer, it reacts with the water in the snow or ice and starts to melt the frozen water. Salts, especially in excess, can damage soil and ultimately vegetation. Evergreens that have had salty slush splashed up on them from the street can show burn symptoms, sometimes months later. In many cases, the best approach is to let sunshine after the storm work it's magic. If you do use deicers, use them sparingly and give them time to work. A little bit can go a long ways if you are patient. Yes, you can also used nitrogen based fertilizers, but keep in mind that these are still salt based, and excess can cause problems for plant materials. I totally understand the need to use deicers, but for your plant's sake, go easy on them, be patient and just let them work! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Merry Christmas

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We are late into December and Christmas is just around the corner. This Christmas will be different for me having lost both my Mother and Mother-in-Law since last Christmas. What times like this do though are make you realize how important those memories of Christmases past really are. Or perhaps that's just a function of age or maybe a little bit of both. The real gifts at Christmas time aren't the material possessions that we may receive or give, but those memories that carry on for years. The time we got together out at Uncle Frank's and all the kids were in the living room sleeping in sleeping bags. I can't tell you what presents I got that year, but I remember the drive out to California and staying at my Uncle's house. I remember the last Christmas I spent with my parents at the farm in Nebraska and the first Christmas without my Dad. The presents I received at any of those occasions are long gone or at least I don't remember what they were. But I remember being with family and friends and the food and the laughter. So during the busy days ahead, make sure you take your foot off the accelerator and just slow down and enjoy the time with the family, the kids, grandkids, nieces or nephews. You just need to make sure that you spend time with them because your time, in the bigger scheme of things, will be the best present you can give them as they remember back in the months and years ahead. I don't need a lot this Christmas, my wish list is short. A few functional items is all that's on it. The best gift, I've already received, it is those memories. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.