

Bush Honeysuckle Control

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When it comes to interaction with the natural world and ecosystems, humans are notorious for acting without thinking, or arrogantly assuming that they can "control" nature. Man will never control nature, just sayin'! So decades ago a pretty little shrub was brought over from eastern Asia. It was called honeysuckle because the little flowers in the spring cover the shrub and smell sweet. The little flowers turn into little red berries which the wildlife relish and eat readily. And therein lies the problem. Thirty years ago bush honeysuckle was still being sold and promoted as a good wildlife plant. While it is good for the wildlife, it's bad for the rest of the ecosystem. When the birds get through digesting the pulp off the berry, the seed gets deposited and they sprout and grow readily. Bush honeysuckle in eastern Kansas and locally has become an invasive pest that probably should qualify it as a noxious weed. It grows well in timbered areas because it leafs out early and retains leaves late allowing it to thrive before and after native trees leaf out. It can become quite dense in the understory resulting in the loss of natural regeneration of native species. If you have one of these in your yard, this fall would be a good time to remove it. If it still has green leaves you can carefully spray it with glyphosate. If the leaves are starting to turn, cut it off at ground level and treat the freshly cut stump with stump and brush killer or concentrated glyphosate. If you get re-sprouts next spring treat them the same way. If you have a stand of timber full of this stuff, call me and we'll talk! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Rose Mulching

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Most people think that you mulch roses to keep them from getting too cold. Which in reality, isn't quite right. We mulch to temper the extreme temperature swings more so than to protect the plants from extreme cold temperatures. We mulch to protect from the devastating effects of very dry winter winds. After all, much of what we call winter burn isn't cold weather but simply tissues drying out. We mulch to keep plants cold as much as anything. We want things to cool down before we mulch plants so that we can trap the cool temperatures in and keep them dormant as long as possible. One of the issues that we often face with plants is that a warm spell in January or February causes them to start breaking dormancy too early, they lose winterhardiness, then cold weather returns and plants are severely frozen. We try to keep the base of the plants and the ground as cool as possible as long as possible. I'll be the first to note that I have some hybrid tea roses in my yard that are 25 years old and have never been mulched. But others did not survive. Hybrid teas are probably the most sensitive of the various roses we grow. Ideally we want to mound soil or compost 8 to 10 inches high around each plant and we want that done by December 1st. It's best if you bring this in from outside the rose garden area as scraping up soil can damage rose roots that are quite shallow. If you want, add a 4 inch layer of straw, leaves or hay over the top of the mounded soil for extra protection. Prune excessively tall canes down to about 36 inches for the winter and then they are ready! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Water 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. Many of you may have already put your hoses away for winter. If you've already done that, I'm sorry. I'm sorry because I'm going to suggest that you get them out and on days over the next few weeks that temperatures are above freezing, water down your landscape plants, especially those trees and shrubs that have been in the ground less than three years as well as any evergreens, whether they are broadleaf or coniferous.

Deciduous trees don't need a lot of water to get through the winter, but it's been kind of dry in recent weeks and roots that are in dry soil will get colder and be more likely to have damage than roots in damp soil. And that all goes back to something I vaguely remember from high school physics class about the high latent heat of fusion of water, whatever that really means! But now we come to the evergreens. Anytime during the winter that it is sunny and the temperature is above freezing, those plants are carrying on photosynthesis because they have functional leaves with chlorophyll. Photosynthesis needs sunlight, chlorophyll and water. If there isn't enough water in the root system, the plant will steal it out of other plant tissue. Then weeks or months later, these leaves or other tissues show up dead. Another case of winter kill that has nothing to do with cold temperatures. So to help reduce the chance of this happening, start by slowly soaking down the soil under these evergreen plants now and then if we go 4 to 6 weeks with little or no precipitation, pick some warm days to hook up the hose and soak them down again!

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High pH Soils

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When it comes to growing plants in our yards and gardens, one of the biggest challenges we face that most people aren't even aware of is soil pH. pH is the measurement of acidity or alkalinity of anything, in this case the soil. pH ranges from 0 to 14 with 7 being neutral. Lower than 7 is increasingly acidic, higher than 7 is increasingly alkaline. Extremes are not good. I pulled up ten recent soil tests that were done on yards and gardens in our area and here were the soil pH readings: 5.9, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.6, 7.9, 8.0. While some plants can tolerate, or prefer, pH ranges in the extreme, most plants are going to thrive with slightly acidic soils of 6.0 to 7. We aim for 6.5. Do you remember hearing me saying any readings in the 6s? That's because I didn't. One sample was under 6 and all the others were over 7. We have alkaline soils around here. How soil is managed can cause it to change pH. Heavy applications of fireplace ashes will raise the pH, not make it acid. Heavy use of nitrogen fertilizer and compost will acidify soils. But generally, we have high pH soils because of limestone and relatively low rainfall. If we have acid soils we add ground limestone. It's easy to fix! If we have alkaline soils we have to add sulfur and be very very patient as it takes time to lower soil pH. But you can't assume anything with soil pH. One backyard can have a garden with soil pH of 7.9 and 3 houses away the soil can be 5.6. You have to have soil analyzed and then we can write a prescription for what needs to be added, if anything. Bring in a pint of soil from your garden to get started! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Selecting a Christmas Tree

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Thanksgiving came early this year so now it's full speed into Christmas and that means Christmas trees. Now, if you are one of the unfortunate ones that get your Christmas tree out of the attic, you can quit listening now! For the rest of you, and me, having that real Christmas tree in the house makes it truly seem like Christmas. You can not emulate the look or the smell of a real tree. But to keep that real tree an attractive addition to your home and not a dreaded dried up mess, there's a few things you need to do. If possible wait until December 1st and ideally, go to a Christmas Tree farm and cut down your own fresh Christmas tree. Or maybe you go out to the pasture and get a cedar tree. That's what we used to do when I was growing up! You see, the fresher the tree, the better it will look and smell and the longer it will last. If you can't cut your own, or get a fresh one shipped in, then select with care. Look through the lot and when you find one you think you like, grab it and thump it butt end first on the ground. If needles fall off like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree, put it back and keep looking. Also, a needle bent between the index finger and thumb should bend, not break. Once you get it home you want it in the stand or a bucket of water just as soon as possible. Before you put it in the water though, cut a half inch off the bottom of the trunk. This cuts off the dried up sap and resins and allows the tree to take up water again. It's important that you check the water once or preferably twice a day as the tree will take up a lot of water right at first! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.