

Gardening with Chuck Programs for December 17 - 23, 2018

Marcescence

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Did you notice how a lot of trees seemed to change leaf color late this fall. Or how many are still holding on to leaves that normally might have dropped them by now? This is called marcescence and quite literally it means the retention of plant organs that normally are shed. The good news is that it's nothing to worry about. With the late season rains many trees were delayed in developing the abscission layer that separates the leaf from the tree to aid in leaf fall. Then a quick spin into cold wintery weather conditions killed the leaves and without the abscission layer, consider it a biological zipper, the leaves aren't falling off like normal. The leaves will dribble off the tree through the winter with a few perhaps staying on until new leaves literally push them off in the spring. But like I said, the tree is OK! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Know Your Houseplants Light Requirements

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Many of us have houseplants. Or perhaps we have winter time houseplants and then those plants go outside in the summer to take advantage of increased sunlight and warmer temperatures. Most of these houseplants are likely classified as tropical foliage plants. The funny thing about these tropical foliage plants is that there's an assumption that because they are tropical, they like hot temperatures and direct sunlight. While many can tolerate those conditions, many do not want full sun. In the tropical climates many of these plants are understory plants. They exist on indirect or filtered sunlight and direct summer sunlight can sometimes be a bit too much for them. Surprisingly, some of our summer temperatures can also be too high for them. Take the time to learn what your plants would prefer! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Pruning Cuts on Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I had a homeowner in my office the other day talking about doing some winter time pruning on trees that had storm damaged branches. The discussion came up with several common misnomers about tree pruning. Never make a flush cut when removing a branch. Stay outside the bark ridge collar, you'll know it when you see it and make the cut at a 90 degree angle leaving as small a pruning cut to heal over as possible. Late winter or early spring is a better time to prune than late fall or early winter as cuts will start to heal sooner, but sometimes you just have to prune when you can. Lastly, never ever use that black gunky pruning sealer. Most of these pruning wound dressings are asphalt or petroleum based and actually retard the natural healing process. If you must do something, use exterior latex paint. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Firewood

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Many people use wood to heat their home or provide auxiliary supplemental heat. There are big misconceptions about the value of different woods for firewood. Ultimately, all wood has the same BTUs per pound, it just takes a bigger chunk to make a pound of some woods compared to others. Oaks, mulberry, hedge and locusts are all dense woods with good BTU ratings per cord, but some, like hedge and honeylocust tend to spark and shouldn't be used in fireplaces. But all the elms, red, American, chinese or whatever, while lower than the oak class, still aren't bad and are readily available. Hackberry, ash and black walnut are all slightly better than the elm class. Silver maple and cottonwood are both at the bottom of the BTU list but are good for kindling or short lived fires in firepits. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Cold Temperature Potato Storage

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. We all know that for most vegetables, storing slightly below 40 degrees, but not freezing, will provide optimum storage conditions for the longest period of time. There are exceptions but that is generally true. Sweet potatoes are an exception to that rule as are winter squash. Irish potatoes store just fine in that 35 to 40 degree range, for several weeks in fact. But a funny thing happens to Irish potatoes when they are stored for periods of time below 40 degrees. Some of the starches in the potatoes will convert to sugars giving the potatoes an unexpected and undesirable sweet taste. Fortunately simply removing the potatoes from the refrigerator or cold storage and allowing them to set at room temperature for 2 to 3 days will allow the sugars to convert back to starches and the undesirable taste will go away. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.