

Understand your plants

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In many ways, plants are like people. Each one is different, they have their preferences, and if you treat them wrong, the outcome isn't going to be good. I see disasters every year from someone planting the wrong plant in the wrong place.

Perhaps they saw a plant when they were visiting a friend somewhere else and they decided that they just had to have one. They find one in a nursery, get it home and then start looking for a place to plant it. All too often, that one open place is not a place that is suited to the plant that they just bought. People buy a tree that is hardy to zone 3a thinking it will survive here just fine because we're a zone 5b. Well, that hardiness zone comes down to just one consideration - cold weather tolerance. I can think of a lot of trees hardy to zone 3 that we shouldn't try to grow here because of hot and dry summer winds. If it survives the blast furnace winds of July and August it'll have no problem making it through the winter. When you are looking for landscape plants, start by defining the area where you need a plant. How much sun, how much wind and how much heat, or cold, will that location get. Is it heavy clay, nice loam, or sandy. What's the soil pH? Does the area have a lot of runoff water? All of these factors will impact the micro-environment that the plant will have to survive in. Learn your yard, the area that you need to landscape, and then you can start looking for the plant that is adapted to that area. It's not rocket science, it's plant science! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Disasters in tree cutting

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I'll bet most of you have spent time cruising around Facebook and get caught watching a video of almost anything. It happened to me one evening last week. It was about four minutes of disasters from people cutting down trees. It was like watching a train wreck in slow motion. You knew what was going to happen next but you couldn't look away. Tree falling on homes, buildings or vehicles. People standing on ladders that then got knocked out from underneath them or being launched into the air. I've spent my fair share of time trimming trees and dropping trees over the years. I've been trained as an arborist. I've yet to destroy anything for one major reason. I took nothing for granted and I didn't let myself get in over my head. A few times I've walked away and called in a professional. If you are out in the timber, cutting firewood, and a tree doesn't fall like you'd planned, it's no big deal as long as your truck isn't in the way. But around buildings is another story. People greatly misunderstand the weight and the power of a falling limb or a tree. Even a small limb can weigh quite a bit and once it starts moving, it has even more power. People fail to understand basic physics and gravity and the simply biology of how trees grow and what happens if they are partially rotten. Just because you have a chain saw in hand and watched a YouTube video, you are not an expert. If you have trees that need to come down, and buildings are close, call in an expert! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Grow your own firewood

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In a few years I'm going to build a house in the country and one of the things that I will put in that house is a wood stove. I don't intend that it'll be the sole source of heat, but I enjoy being able to add a little heat on a cold evening and if an ice storm takes down the power lines, I'll still be able to keep warm. A lot of people have wood stoves or fireplaces and often spend a lot of time cutting firewood. So here's a novel thought, instead of scrounging on your property or on others, with permission of course, why not treat firewood like a crop and grow your own? All too often we think of firewood as being oak or something that has taken a long time to grow. We cut big trees and we have to split them and it really is a lot of work. Let's take a tree species that is fairly dense, well adapted and grows fairly quickly. Take black locust. It's denser than oak and grows quite fast. Plant a half acre to an acre of black locust every year for five years. That's roughly a square 200 by 200 feet. Plant the trees on 6 foot spacings, yeah that's somewhere between 1,000 and 1,200 per acre. Control weeds the first two years. After five years, harvest the first year's planting. Sure, they may not be a foot across, but they'll be big enough to feed into a wood stove or fireplace. Here's the cool part. After cutting, most black locust will re-sprout and grow even faster. Every year you move on to the next year's planting and there you go. A continually renewing firewood stand that's close to home! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Cloning Apple Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Apple trees are a popular thing for home gardeners. But often one homeowner plants an apple tree, the house is sold three times, the cultivar information is lost and a new homeowner eventually acquires the property, loves the fruit from that apple tree and wants one just like it. Sometimes they bring me in an apple (please don't bring me a leaf, they all look alike!) and sometimes I can tell them what the variety of apple is. But sometimes I can't. The next question that comes along invariably is, "well can't I plant out the seeds and get some new trees?" Well, yes you can, but because apple trees are not pure lines and every fruit is usually cross pollinated, you won't get a tree like you've already got and the chances of getting something equal or better than what you've got is about 80,000 to 1. The other problem is that it's probably going to take 6 to 7 years for the seedling tree to become mature enough to start bearing fruit. And that is why I decided NOT to become a fruit tree breeder! Most apple cultivars are grafted from one single original parent tree on to dwarf or semi-dwarf rootstock. Because of our weather, semi-dwarf root stocks are usually better adapted and produce a sturdier tree. If you really want to learn how, I can teach you to graft. But you need patience and a steady hand. And if you really want to get crazy, you can graft more than one cultivar onto the same rootstock. It's all a lot of work, and you'd be better off to just go out, and buy some new trees! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

What kind of tomato do you want?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Tomatoes are THE most popular vegetable in the US. They are loved the world over which has led to constant development of new cultivars based on where you are and what you want. In active cultivation, world wide, right now, there are over 3,000 cultivars of tomatoes. Some horticulturalists have calculated that there are over 15,000 cultivars of tomatoes that are known to have existed. So if you seem to have problems narrowing it down to the 1 or 2 or 5 cultivars you want to plant, it's understandable. Fortunately, Master Gardeners in Kansas and other states test the most common tomato cultivars every year. They measure average fruit size in ounces, average number of fruits per plant and total pounds of fruit per plant. Cultivars like Beefmaster, Jet Star, Summer Pick, Florida 91 and Celebrity were all heavy producers, averaging over 9 pounds of tomatoes per plant in Missouri trials. Kansas trials are still being analyzed. Do you want big tomatoes? Then go for Amana Orange, Brandywine Pink, Giant Belgium, Beefmaster or Ponderosa Pink. These all had average fruit size over 9 ounces per tomato. Do you want a lot of fruit per plant? Well, the smaller the fruit, the more you'll have. Paste tomatoes like Amish Paste and Roma will have over 50 per plant. But cultivars like Jet Star, Rutgers, Celebrity and Beefsteak all had over 25 fruit per plant. There's a lot of information in this chart and if you'd like to see it to help select your cultivars, call me and ask for it! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.