

Gardening with Chuck for January 1 - 7, 2018

Beware the catalog!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We've probably had more cold weather since Christmas than we've had the past two years combined. So what's starting to show up in the mail now, just when you are the most susceptible? Yup, the gardening catalogs in all their full color glory! It's cold, the holidays are over, you're stuck inside because it's too darn cold to want to go outside so you sit there and start looking at the catalogs and everything just starts looking better and better. Which then causes me to say - step away from the catalog and come back to reality. We used to just have to worry about catalogs and most of those didn't show up until well into January. But now days we also have to worry about all those seed selling web pages! Those catalogs, and all those nice and slick web pages are there for one reason and one reason only. To sell you things. They don't care if you don't have room for even half of what you're about to order. They want to sell you something. So you have to have a plan. Know how much space you have. Know how much you really need. Know how much space each thing you want to plant takes up. In other words, have a plan. Next, you need a stop gap. Or perhaps a better word for it is a reality check. Spouses and children are great for this. Make a list of how much of what you want to order to plant. If you have 3 different eggplant varieties on your list and nobody else in the family likes eggplant, you probably need to reduce that number down. A bunch. Slow down and be practical. Yes, it's been cold and ugly, but get that spring fever under control and don't go crazy! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Vegetable Garden Planning

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I see two very common mistakes with inexperienced gardeners, okay all gardeners. First of all they think that they can manage a much larger garden than they really can and secondly, they try to squeeze too much into the space that they have. A 500 square foot garden may not sound like much, until it's late June, it's hot, and it's humid because it's been raining for ten days straight and the garden is full of weeds. Trust me, I've had even larger gardens than that and it's a lot of work. If you're new to gardening, start small and increase the size of your garden slowly. The bigger error comes from gardeners trying to pack too much into their space. Plants need room. You need space between plants to move around for weed control and harvest. You need space between plants, such as tomatoes, so that the wind can blow and keep the leaves as dry as possible. Even if you think you're an experienced gardener you need to pick up the just updated version of our great bulletin, the Vegetable Garden Planning Guide. This guide tells you how much of something you need per person. It tells you how much space the different plants need. It even has a great page to show you when you should plan to plant each crop and when you can expect to harvest. This is a super update of a classic bulletin and it may hold a few surprises such as, April is not an appropriate time to plant tomatoes. Potatoes can be planted in July in addition to March, and very few people truly give tomatoes the space they need, as in 8 to 12 square feet per plant! Pick up a copy today! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Use wisdom when selecting 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. Do you know why nurseries and especially the big box stores that sell plants, carry the plants that they do? It's because customers are asking for them. It has very little to do with how well suited that plant is for the particular climate where you live. Or worse yet, the plant may survive in your area, IF you put it in the right place. There are several things that you need to know before you ever buy a single landscape plant. First of all, what is your plant hardiness zone? Plant hardiness zones are determined by the USDA and have to do with expected average low winter temperatures. According to the most recent plant hardiness zone map, Geary County is a zone 6A. On average we can expect minimum winter temperatures of 5 to 10 below zero. So when you are buying landscape plants, make sure that they can survive in zone 6A. By the way, the zones range from 1 in Alaska with minimum temperatures, not wind chill but actual temperatures, of -55 to -60 clear up to zones 13 in Puerto Rico where you'd expect minimum temperatures of 55 to 60 and that's above zero. While cold weather plant hardiness is an important measure, there's also considerations of soil conditions. We tend to have alkaline soils. Plants that prefer acid soils, like blueberries, aren't going to do very well around here. There's soil depth. Sycamores are hardy around here, but they need deep soils in river bottoms. Planting one in a yard in west Junction City, where you have a foot of soil and then rocks, would not be a good idea. Tomorrow, a few more considerations when selecting plants. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Putting the right plant in the right place

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Yesterday we were talking about plant hardiness zones and I stated that this was just the first step in selecting landscape plants. We have a concept that we call the right plant in the right place. What it comes down to is knowing what kind of conditions a plant species needs. Plants, just like people, have preferences. Some plants need full sunlight while others want partial shade or full shade. You put a shade plant in full sun especially a windy place, and you'll toast them. Put a sun loving plant in the shade and it'll slowly shrivel to just barely hanging on to life. I just mentioned the wind and that can be a big one here in the Great Plains. We have wind here and in the summer it can be a blast furnace. I've got some big old boxwood shrubs in my backyard. They are big and thriving because they are protect from the hot summer winds out of the southwest. Know the direction your house sits and where the windy locations are. Soil preference can be very important. For the most part, we tend to have very heavy soils with high clay content. This is something that you just can't change overnight by hauling in a little extra topsoil. If you have a plant that needs well drained soil and you plant it in an area of heavy clay that is slow to dry out you'll kill that poor plant in no time at all from rot root. Acid vs alkaline soil is a big one as well. I'd love to grow heather, but our soils are too alkaline with too much limestone in them. You may see a lot of certain plants in landscapes here, because that's what survives. So know what you've got and what will survive where you live! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Starting Plants from Seed

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As we move on through winter and start edging closer and closer to spring, one way that we gardeners can keep our sanity, is to start plants indoors from seed. But if you don't plan things just right, you'll drive yourself to distraction. Plants need light. Even a bright window may very well NOT have enough light intensity to meet the needs of what you are trying to grow. That's why plants you've started in the past get all tall and leggy and lean towards the nearest window. More than likely you will need to build a light frame to hold a couple of fluorescent light fixtures. Then you have to keep the lights literally on top of the plants. When I've grown tomatoes and peppers from seed under lights before I literally had the lights almost touching the top leaves. What gets as many people in trouble when they start plants from seed as not having enough light, is not starting the plants at the right time. To be effective you need to first of all know when it's safe to transplant what you're starting from seed. That becomes your target date. Next you need to know how long it'll take to get the plants from seed to transplantable size. That then becomes your seeding date. Let's take the ever popular tomatoes. It takes six weeks to get tomatoes germinated and grown to a good transplanting size. We normally recommend planting tomatoes around the end of the first week of May. Move back from that six weeks and you'll be planting your tomato seed, inside, around the last week of March. Different plants have different lead times ranging from 4 to 12 weeks. See me for more details. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.