

Gardening with Chuck for January 29 - February 4, 2018

Fruit Trees and Cold Weather

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I am the proud owner of several fruit trees and over the next few years I will be planting more. Fruit trees can be a lot of work but boy, nothing is better than eating a tree ripened apple plucked right off the tree. One of the biggest frustrations that fruit tree owners deal with is frost when the trees are blooming. Sometimes it's because we've planted our trees in the wrong location, be sure to listen to tomorrow's program, but a lot of the time we are simply dealing with a fruit species that is prone to breaking dormancy early. Peaches, and especially apricots, head the list for this problem. I've lost track of how many years I've seen apricot trees blooming in February. This isn't good when our average last frost isn't until mid April. Homeowners will purchase a cultivar that is hardy and is labeled as late blooming. But the problem is that university studies showed that the difference between early and late blooming apricot cultivars, was on average only 4 days. If you want an apricot get one that is considered late blooming, like Harglow, and then try to plant it in an appropriate location. For peaches, choose late blooming cultivars like China Pearl, Encore, Rising Star, Reliant, and Intrepid. Peaches also appear to have differences in cold hardiness of the blooms, so that two different cultivars, blooming at the same time will show different amounts of damage to the same freezing temperature. The peach Intrepid has shown excellent cold hardiness and tops my list! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Planning Your Fruit Orchard

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I love fruit trees. I enjoy taking care of them and I enjoy the taste of fruit picked at the peak of flavor right off the tree. The farm that I grew up on had a large fruit orchard and I got to learn from a very young age how to take care of fruit trees. But one of the things you need to be aware of is that if you look around our area you will not see any large commercial fruit orchards. There's a reason for that. Untimely frost in the spring is the big one. I talked about that yesterday. But many of the failures that people have come from poor planning on where the trees were located. You want fruit trees where they'll get full summer sun, but be the last place to warm up in the spring. Homeowners invariably think that they need to protect their fruit trees from the cold winter winds so they plant them on the south side of their house, which is going to be the warmest place in their yard. The ground warms up early, the tree breaks dormancy early, it starts to bloom early and then along comes the frost. Boom! No fruit! So if you are planning to plant some fruit trees, go forward with the knowledge that you won't have fruit every year. Avoid the species most likely to get zapped - apricots, sweet cherries and peaches are the most susceptible. Apples, pears and tart or pie cherries are the least susceptible. Then pick a good cold spot that'll be slow to warm up. Also stop by the Extension office and pick up a copy of planning your fruit orchard bulletin which will provide some planning hints as well. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dutch Elm Disease resistant elms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In the 1960s and 70s a tree disease, Dutch Elm Disease raced across the country killing the native American and red elms by the thousands. Community after community saw their street trees and landscape tree turned to lifeless skeletons leaving homeowners and municipalities with a big expense of cutting down and disposing of the trees. Okay, that sounded a little dramatic but it gets the point across. We still see some of those big majestic American elms on our streets. They may have just been lucky and escaped the disease or they may actually be resistant. Time will tell. Since that time, arborists across the eastern US have spent years of tracking down what appeared to be resistant American elms, propagating them and putting them into trials to test their usability and resistance. Four American elm cultivars have emerged as good choices. Three have had 100% survival in trials and one has had 80% survival. If you are looking for a nice classic shade tree, with moderate growth rate, you may want to consider these. The cultivars that showed 100% survival in the trials are: Valley Forge, Princeton and New Harmony. These are not hybrids but true American elms. They have the classic vase shape of the American elm, and typical strength to wind and ice storm damage. A fourth cultivar, Lewis and Clark, sometimes called Prairie Expedition showed 80% survival which isn't bad, but when I decide to plant one, it'll be one of the 100% survival cultivars! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Planning for shade trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The easiest thing to do is dig a hole, plop a tree in it, throw some dirt in and move on. The quickest way to kill a tree or give it a poor start is to dig a hole, plop a tree in it, throw some dirt in and move on. Slow growth of trees in landscape settings is most often a result of poor planning, poor pre-plant site management and poor post planting care. Here are some things that you need to keep in mind when planting landscape trees. First of all, pick the right tree for the conditions that you have. Know your soil, know your sun and wind exposure - I could spend a week's worth of programs talking about mistakes made by simply putting the wrong tree in the wrong place. Next, select a medium size tree. While you can pay a lot of money for a very large tree that might have to be spaded in with a tree spade, you are often better off planting a simple 6 foot tree, taking care of it and being patient. After ten years, no one will likely be able to tell the difference. Dig a hole twice as big as the root ball but not twice as deep. Make sure that the root flares are at soil level. Maintain a vegetation free zone out three feet in all directions of the tree. Then apply an organic mulch in that zone. Any vegetation, but grass especially, is very competitive with young trees. Don't fertilize the first couple of years. Just keep the tree well watered, once a week if there isn't rain, but don't drown it. You can start fertilizing in year 3, but water and grass free zones are the most important things for tree growth. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Give a new tree a fighting chance!

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I spoke yesterday about some important steps in getting trees going well. Keeping grass and all vegetation at least 3 feet away is very important. First of all turfgrass is very competitive for water and nutrients. The grass roots are right at the surface and have first shot at water and fertilizer. The other problem with having grass close to the bottom of the tree is the lawn mower and the weed eater. Homeowners don't realize that just a little nick with the edge of the lawn mower or a slap with the line on a line trimmer can do a great deal of damage to the tender young bark. This damage can show up several years later as dead bark above the injury starts to split and fall off. Any tree species has very tender bark as a young tree and it needs to be treated with care. Likewise, in the fall of the year, young trees should be wrapped with that brown tree wrapping paper to protect it from sun scald over the winter. Maples are very sensitive to this but it can hit almost any young tree. Just be sure to get that paper wrap off the tree by late March or early April. Be very careful using lawn herbicides around young trees as well, The bark can often easily absorb lawn weed herbicides leading to damage. Finally, we want to avoid fertilizers the first couple of years. Fertilizers, especially nitrogen, are salt based and we can create high soil salt problems which will burn tender young roots. Give the tree two years to start developing roots and then we can work on fertilizing. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.