

Heirloom varieties vs newer hybrids

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If you want to get a really big argument started in gardening circles, bring up the subject of heirloom varieties. Some people are incredibly passionate about heirloom vegetable varieties for one reason or another. So what is an heirloom variety? Well, that's part of the confusion. For many people an heirloom variety can not be a hybrid, it must be "open pollinated" or pure line. For others it has to just be an OLD variety. That certainly narrows it down. Okay, probably the most consistent and consistently accepted definition comes from Burpee seeds and goes like this: heirloom varieties are open-pollinated meaning that unlike hybrids, seeds you collect from one year will produce plants with most of the characteristics of the parent plant. There are some that feel that heirloom plants taste better or are better for you. The first may hold some truth, the second one, not so much. Of course taste is very subjective. If you grew up eating Rutgers tomatoes like I did, then eating one again brings back good memories and tastes like I remember tomatoes tasting when I was growing up. Does that make them better? Not necessarily. As for healthier, there is no evidence of that what so ever. Now I have no issue with heirloom varieties. I even grow some. But keep in mind that many heirloom varieties do not have the disease resistance of newer hybrids. They may have lower yields and they may have shorter bearing periods. Those newer hybrids were developed to meet shortcomings in older varieties. So go ahead and grow them if you like, just understand the tradeoffs! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dormant Oils What are They, What do They do

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Many home gardeners become confused, sometimes very confused. The most common problem that I run into has to do when talking with homeowners who have peach trees and I tell them to make a dormant season fungicide application to prevent peach leaf curl. So the homeowner goes to the store not knowing the difference between a dormant season fungicide and a crabgrass preventer and likely gets a clerk that isn't much more knowledgeable. They don't see dormant season fungicide on a label anywhere but lo and behold Volck Oil Spray and the words Dormant Season right there on the label. The purchase is made, the homeowner goes home, applies the product and then calls me up when the peach leaves get all distorted in May and June. I'm not going to talk about dormant fungicide sprays, but I am going to talk about the Dormant Oil Spray. Dormant oil is a highly refined heavy oil that can be used very carefully in the growing season but with good success in the dormant season. At spring and summer temperatures you can cause some serious burn to foliage. Dormant oils are used to control mites and scale insects on trees and shrubs. But not all mites and not all scale insects. Spider mites that normally get on tomatoes and other garden plants, yeah, they're overwintering in residue on the ground. Not going to do any good. It is helpful on euonymus scale though. But if you don't have any of these insects, then you are wasting your money. Don't buy and use a dormant oil unless you have a pest that it will control. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Winter Bird Feeding

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With the holidays behind us and finally the arrival of colder weather, it can be a good time to put some bird feeders out in your backyard. Backyard bird feeding is relatively inexpensive and can provide hours of enjoyment for the entire family and bring multiple generations of the family together on cold snowy days to watch the birds come to the feeders! If you have absolutely no landscaping, as in trees, in your yard or your neighbor's yards, you may be hard pressed to attract birds to your back yard. But if you have a few trees of even moderate size, you should have birds visiting your feeders. Some people tend to go a bit overboard with bird feeders but I encourage folks to consider a very simple approach. If you are going to have just one feeder, have a hanging feeder and fill it with black oil sunflower seed. This is the more preferred food of all birds that visit feeders. For a second feeder you may want to get a little wire cage feeder, very inexpensive, that you can put pre-formed suet blocks in. These will attract woodpeckers and nuthatches and many other species in really cold weather. You may also want to consider a ground feeder or just buy one of the bird seed mixes and scatter it on the ground or the edge of the patio to attract doves, juncos and other ground feeding species. There are many other speciality feeds and feeders you can use, but these would be the basics. If you want more information on back yard bird feeding I have several really good bulletins on back yard bird feeding and can even give you some suggestions for some bird books as well! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Some winter time blooms

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It doesn't take too much winter to get us longing for some blossoms in our homes. Many of the spring flowering bulbs can be forced using cold treatment to get blooms in pots, but you really needed to start those back last fall. However, there is one bulb that doesn't need that extensive chilling period to get it to bloom. Paperwhites are a form of daffodil that don't require that chilling treatment. First of all track down some paperwhite bulbs. You may have to order them on line, but they are available. Use a 3 to 4 inch deep decorative container that doesn't have drain holes. Clear glass works great so you can see the water level. Place 1 to 2 inches of washed gravel, glass beads, marbles or stones in the bottom of the container. Place the bulbs on the media and have the bulbs almost touching each other. Then add some more of the media you put in the bottom to help hold the bulbs in place. Add enough water so that just the bottom of the bulb is sitting in water, don't submerge the bulb. Maintain water at this level. It will normally take 4 to 8 weeks for the bulbs to bloom. As they grow it helps to keep them under as bright a light as possible and cooler temperatures, somewhere around 65 would be ideal. Otherwise they can get rather leggy. Another option to keep them short is to wait until you have about an inch of green shoot on the bulbs, then pour off the water and start using a solution of 1 part 70% rubbing alcohol with 11 parts of water. This low alcohol solution will keep the plants growing just fine but keep them about 1/3 shorter than normal. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Squirrels in your backyard

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Squirrels are a love/hate situation for most people. You either love them or you hate them. If you're an avid backyard bird feeder like I am, then you hate them as they try, and usually succeed in getting into your feed, especially sunflower seeds. But they are adorable and their antics can be quite entertaining! Fox, or red, squirrel numbers have been increasing over the past 35 years. Increasingly rapidly in some cases. Increasing squirrel numbers, in fact, may be one of the reasons why we have more Turkey Vultures in towns in the summer now. The famed black squirrels, and yes we have them around here, are just a color variant of the fox squirrel. If you happen to have squirrels raiding your bird feeders let me just tell you now that there is no such thing as a truly squirrel proof feeder. They will eventually figure out a way to defeat it. The best you can do is put out feeders for the squirrels and try to keep them off the bird feeders. Squirrels may prefer to feed on the ground so make it easy and put food they like at ground level. One option that I have had some success with is to use pre-treated bird seed or treat it yourself with ground cayenne pepper. Not chili powder, it has to be cayenne or red pepper. The squirrels get a good mouth full of the pepper and they may think twice before coming back. This works because birds have different taste receptors in their mouths and the capsaicin, the compound that makes peppers hot, doesn't affect them. But it does squirrels. Just one word of warning, be careful when treating the seed so you don't get a face full! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.