

## How to Kill a Tree

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There are a lot of homeowners that do an excellent job of killing trees. The problem is that they are not trying to kill a tree, they are trying to grow a tree and they wind up doing absolutely everything wrong! So let's quickly hit some of the most common mistakes homeowners make. Tree variety selection is crucial. People plant trees that they like without any consideration to whether it is a good choice. Let me quickly add that red maples are not a good choice for our area, nor are blue spruce. People try to plant as big a tree as possible and they'd often be time and money ahead to plant a much smaller tree. The larger the tree, the greater the transplant shock resulting in smaller trees catching up and surpassing the bigger tree in just a few years! You need to dig a big hole and then plant the tree at the same depth it was growing in the nursery. If the tree is ball and burlapped, take all the stuff off and make sure that the roots are headed in the right direction. Mulch the tree with a good organic mulch but don't do a mulch volcano. It should be a mulch donut. Newly planted trees don't really need fertilizer. In fact too much fertilizer at planting can burn roots slowing down growth and establishment. Finally watering is often done all wrong. Water a newly planted tree when you plant it, then again the next day and again three days later. After that, in the absence of rain, water every 7 to 10 days. A garden hose running a trickle is best but check soil moisture first. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Winter Squash

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Unlike zucchini and other summer squash, our winter squash are the LAST thing that we plant each spring, in fact we recommend not planting winter squash until late May through mid June. Now, this isn't because they are overly frost sensitive, they are no different than the much earlier planted summer squash. No, we plant winter squash later because unlike summer squash where we use as an immature fruit with tender rind and small seeds, the winter squash is used for it's meaty flesh. We take the fruit to full maturity so that the rind is hard and it will survive for often months in storage. So to time the fruit maturation process with the season, we plant early June so that we are harvesting from late August into early October. Winter squash tend to be more resistant to the annual nuisance known as squash bugs - in fact if you have summer squash you need to start treating them in another ten days for squash bugs whether you have seen any or not. Acorn and butternut, both winter squash cultivars are considered resistant to squash bugs. With that said, I would still treat my winter squash every two weeks for squash bugs just to reduce any chance for damage. Plant winter squash seeds in hills five to six feet apart from each other. Usually just a few hills are all that is needed but if you plant a lot of winter squash, keep the rows about 8 feet apart and 5 feet apart within the row. I typically plant 4 to 8 seeds per hill and thin down to 3 or 4 plants if all the seeds come up. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Sweet Potato Time

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Sweet potatoes are a tropical vine with absolutely no relationship to Irish potatoes. Technically they are in the morning glory family. While people frequently call them yams they are not yams. Yams are also a tropical vine but not related to sweet potatoes but are very important in many different ways, but that's a story for another day. As I said, sweet potatoes are a tropical vine. They HAVE to have warm weather and warm soil. We generally discourage planting sweet potatoes before mid May as consistent soil temperatures above 70 degrees are really preferred by them. We are there now so you can plant sweet potatoes anytime through late June, but the sooner you get them in the ground, the better. Sweetpotatoes like hot weather and moderate fertility. They grow best in a loamy soil so regular addition of organic matter to our clay soils will help. Unlike Irish potatoes, where the tuber develops from underground stems, the sweet potato is actually a root that develops under the vines. Regular watering is very beneficial to encourage sweetpotatoes to start rooting from the vines. Most people plant in the middle of a ridged row. Plant the transplants about 12 inches apart in rows 3 to 4 feet apart. Fertilize prior to planting and then again about a month after planting. Once the vines have covered the ground, weed control will be easier. They have few insect and disease issues but come early fall you really need to get the roots dug before we have a frost. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Falling Leaves

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Tree leaves fall off of trees. It happens every year and we are used to it. But we normally expect it to be happening in the fall, not in May. So why are we finding trees all over the area with lots of green stuff on the ground underneath them?

This is a very weird year and I think it's safe to say we're going to see additional weird stuff before it is over. Sometimes trees put on a lot of leaves when they first green up only to discover that they may have overdone it a little bit, due to heat and drought, so they'll immediately start shedding some leaves. We will likely see waves of leaves coming off trees this summer if it stays hot and dry. Periodic watering will help to reduce this, at least on small to medium sized trees.

Sometimes we'll find young squirrels who start biting off leaves, or more often it's the ends of branches or even pieces of bark. The best way to explain this is that they've just figured out they have teeth and they are learning how to use them. Sometimes what we see under trees aren't leaves at all, but other parts off the tree. Oaks are blooming and as those male blossoms get through they drop off. I've seen a lot of redbuds dropping small seed pods that started to form but they then aborted because of poor pollination or stress. And finally, sometimes it's birds.

Young hackberry leaves can have a lot of insects on them and I've watched small birds working their way through a hackberry tree gleaning insects and in the process, nip off those small branches. Seriously! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Peach Leaf Curl

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Every time that I think we've had a dry enough winter and early spring so that peach leaf curl won't be a problem, I get proven wrong! So no predictions this year, just what to look for. Peach leaf curl is a fungal disease that overwinters on the branches and bud scales which infects the leaves just as they are breaking dormancy and starting to grow. But the disease doesn't manifest itself immediately. It may not show up until several weeks later. What will happen is that one day all the leaves on your peach tree look fine and a few days later you notice that some are starting to show some distorted growth. The leaf starts to curl oddly and then it starts to sort of pucker up and it will often turn partly or totally red or yellow eventually falling off. Sometimes it's just a few leaves, other times it can nearly defoliate the entire tree. But the tree puts out new leaves before long and on it goes. The problem is that if you had fruit on the tree, energy that should have been going into growing nice big juicy peaches is being diverted to growing new leaves and fruit production suffers. The thing about peach leaf curl is the same thing we see with most plant diseases. Once you start to see the disease developing, it is too late to do anything about it. Most plant diseases can not be cured, only prevented. The leaves were infected as they broke out of the bud. The answer is to proactively spray the tree in February, before the buds break, with a fungicide. Mark your calendar! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.