

### Changes at the bird feeder

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. This is the time of year that I routinely start to get phone calls from homeowners concerned because they have no birds in their backyards, and no birds at their feeders. This year it seems to be even more questions than normal for some reason. First of all there isn't anything wrong. There hasn't been any major catastrophe that has struck the bird world. We are in that changing season that happens every year. Hummingbird season is winding down and there'll be a few more stragglers over the next couple of weeks. Many of our summer nesting resident species are pretty well gone or dwindling fast. Each successive cold front passage, starting in late August, moves more and more birds out. We have had a couple of pretty big fronts that moved more than normal. With each upcoming cold front, the winter time species of birds will start arriving. Goldfinches are losing their bright yellow summer colors as we speak, getting their dull mustardy colored plumage of winter. Juncos and Harris's Sparrows will be hitting the state probably this week. But it may still be several weeks before they show up at your feeders. Since most of our backyard birds are seed eaters, they have a real abundance of food choices right now. Weeds and flowers, like sunflowers, are amazingly heavy laden with natural food sources. It may be well into December before they start hitting your feeders hard. In the meantime keep your feeders filled and be patient, they will be coming! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Branch tips in the yard

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I was driving down the street late last week and as I drove by one house I saw the front yard literally covered with small branch tips under and around the big old oak tree. While this may be a concern, it's really nothing to worry about!

Branch tips or short branches in your yard this time of year is not an uncommon occurrence. If you are finding small branches with a cut end that looks like a miniature beaver chewed it off, you have a twig girdler. Twig girdlers are small beetles that eat notches in these little branches, lay eggs in them and then almost chew the branch off, just leaving a little stub holding it to the tree. When the next gust of wind hits the tree it will break the branch off and tumble it along the ground. The eggs will hatch this fall and the small borer larvae will eat into the branch. They will overwinter as an immature borer only to hatch out late next summer to start it all over again.

There's no chemical control for this and while concerning, it doesn't really hurt the tree, gather up the branches and burn them. If the branch tips are shorter and cut at a sharp angle, like with a knife, this is the work of a squirrel. They get up in the tree, cut off branch tips and then haul them back up in the tree to build their winter nests. The best thing to do here is to leave them. If you pick them up, the squirrel will just cut off more. Let them have the branch tips and ignore it.

In the bigger scheme of things it doesn't really hurt the tree and the fewer you pick up, the better! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Sunscald Prevention

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I think it is sometimes hard for homeowners to believe that trees can get sunburned. In trees we call it sunscald and we are most likely to see it in thin-barked young trees like fruit trees, ashes, oaks, lindens and especially maples. What happens is that the bark on these trees isn't very thick and on sunny days in the winter the south and southwest sides of the tree will be warmed by the sun sometimes as much as 40 degrees warmer than the bark on the shady side of the trunk. This warming action can cause a loss of cold hardiness, cells become active and become susceptible to freeze damage. The temperature drops overnight and these cells don't have a chance to become hardened off, they freeze and die. You don't know anything has happened until a year or two or three later when you notice the bark splitting and then sloughing off leaving long narrow dead spots on the south or southwest side of the tree. I see this a lot in sugar and red maple trees. The tree can survive if it has a lot of TLC. The way to prevent this is to apply a light colored wrap to the trunks of young or recently planted trees. I recommend doing it the year it is planted and then one, maybe two winters after. This should be done in October or November but then be sure to remove it the following March. Don't leave it on through the spring and summer. Wrap the tree, somewhat snugly but not overly tight, from the ground all the way up to the first branch. You may need to use some tape at the top. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Ornamental Grass Management

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The drought this year really stunted my ornamental grass clumps which in my case is good old pampas grass. The grass actually grew pretty well, but I didn't have near the number of seed stalks come up out of each clump. And the ones that did come out were 4 or 5 feet tall instead of 6 to 8 feet like normal. But that's okay. We like to leave these clumps pretty well intact all through the winter, waiting until early March to cut them back and remove the foliage. Leaving the foliage intact provides good protection for the winter to the crown of the plant. Insects and even small rodents may take refuge inside these clumps and I've seen more than one rabbit snuggle up to the base under those drooping leaves on a cold winter's night. The brownish red foliage the long drooping leaves and seed stalks, be they short or tall, add interest to an otherwise drab winter landscape. But there is a dark side to these clumps of ornamental grasses. That dry foliage is flammable. VERY flammable. My grass clumps are at the end of the driveway on the farm. In March, on a calm evening, I burn mine off. It takes literally one match and less than five minutes later the clump is blackened and smoldering. If you have ornamental grass clumps, of any size, next to a building you need to remove the foliage once it has gone well dormant, usually by Thanksgiving. Cut the foliage down to about 2 or 3 inches and get that fire hazard away from the house where it won't accidentally catch fire! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

## Preparing to Bring Plants Inside

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 had some nice crisp cool fall evenings already but nothing really cold yet. Mid to upper 40s is the coldest I've seen. But before long we'll be dipping into the 30s and then frost will be looming on the horizon. Many of us move tropical foliage plants outside during the summer so they can take advantage of the heat and bright sun. These plants do not have the ability to survive freezing weather and we have to bring them inside if we want to keep them. Not only will these plants not survive freezing weather, many of them really need to come in before we routinely have overnight temperatures below 50. 50 seems to be a magical threshold for many of these plants. Too many nights below 50 and they start to have cold shock and then root rot can set in. We also have blooming plants like geraniums and begonias that we often bring inside over winter. Unless you have very special places to put these plants your goal should be to just get them through the winter. Don't prune them excessively. Don't fertilize them heavily. You just want to keep them alive. It's okay to trim back excessive growth so it's easier to man handle the plant to get it in. Pick out dead foliage, twigs and leaves and such from the pot - you can even use a shop vac to carefully do this. If you've had problems with gnats coming in with your pots, water them with water and a general purpose insecticide several days before bringing them in. Then water when dry, not by the calendar. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.