

Cold Storage of Potatoes

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Potatoes are the most popular starch food in the US. Potatoes also have a long storage life which makes it a great food item to have around as it is not highly perishable. In fact storing potatoes in temperatures in the high 30s allows them to keep for months and remain firm. You have to be careful though not to freeze them so monitor your refrigerator temperatures closely. But when you store potatoes below 40 degrees, strange things can start to happen inside that tuber. The starches start to convert to sugars which then leads to an undesirable sweet taste. Fortunately this process is reversible. All you have to do is to place the potatoes at room temperatures for 2 to 3 days and all the sugars will convert back to starches. In fact, if you go through a lot of potatoes, storing them at room temperatures is probably fine! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Holiday Cactus

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Some people call them Christmas cactus, some call them Thanksgiving cactus, and yes they are different species. And they hybridize readily. I just call them holiday cactus and go on from there!

Regardless, these plants are technically epiphytes in their native environment meaning that they use another plant for support but not for nutrients. These plants, like many South American jungle plants, prefer indirect sunlight and just normal household temperatures. Getting them to flower at the right time of year involves a combination of watering and water stress, fertilizing lightly every two weeks until winter and then withholding fertilizer. You can also tweak flowering through temperature and daylight manipulation for 25 days. If you'd like the details, call me at the Extension Office. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Holiday Fruits

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. I always joke that the biggest challenge for the holidays is what to do with the fruits and nuts, and I'm not talking about family members. Holiday fruit baskets are a popular gift. In some cases the fruit is gone in short order, but proper storage will stretch out how long it'll stay good. Unpack and separate the fruits. Tree fruits like apples, pears, grapefruit and oranges will store best at around 40 degrees either in the refrigerator or an attached unheated garage. Tropical fruits, except for those citrus fruits, and this includes bananas, need to be stored at room temperature and used fairly soon after receiving as they simply are more perishable with shorter storage life. The tree fruits and citrus fruits can usually be expected to store 3 to 4 weeks at that 40 degree range, without shriveling or losing crispness. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Holiday Nuts

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Yesterday it was holiday fruits, today it is holiday nuts! We often think of nuts as being long storage life produce but you need to remember that they are high in oils and oils can go rancid. If you've never bit into a nut that's gone rancid, you're lucky! While it's handy to have a nut bowl out where you have easy access, you're better off to keep the nuts in the refrigerator or freezer, either shelled or unshelled to reduce water loss. The more water that the nuts loses the more quickly they will go rancid. You can store them shelled or unshelled but shelled will take up less space. Put them in a plastic container with a tight fitting lid or a resealable plastic bag. This will keep them from absorbing flavors from other foods. While they will store in the freezer for up to a year, quality is best if they are used in six months. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Slow Down...

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. We are mere days away from Christmas. From now until early January most folks are going to be going non-stop to parties, family gatherings, etc. My wish for everyone for the holidays is that you can actually slow down, literally and figuratively over the coming days. The literal part comes down to being careful when you drive. It's now officially winter and we've already seen some snow. As you travel to see the various family members, travel prepared, allow extra time and be patient. Most importantly drive sober! But also make sure that you and your family have quiet time. There's so much stress already with the holidays that you don't need to add to it by having your mind rushing a hundred miles per hour. The holidays race by fast enough the way it is so slow down and savor the special times. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.