

D's Notes 12/13/21

Holiday Tips: Save time by freezing dough for yeast bread, cookies *By Emily Halstead, K-State Research and Extension news*

The holiday season can get busy, and being able to prepare yeast bread dough ahead of time and freeze it for later use could save time, said Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee.

Blakeslee said preparing and freezing yeast bread dough must go hand-in-hand with proper food safety practices.

“When making any kind of baked good, remember to wash your hands before and after handling flour and the dough,” said Blakeslee, who is coordinator of K-State’s Rapid Response Center. “Raw flour has been linked to several foodborne illness outbreaks, so it is important to keep hands clean.”

“To save time during the holidays, or any time of the year, prepare yeast bread dough ahead of time and freeze into dough balls for rolls to bake later,” Blakeslee said. “The trick is using a dough with extra yeast because slow freezing can damage yeast.”

Blakeslee’s advice for safely freezing yeast bread dough includes:

- Increase the yeast by $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon per 3 cups of flour to your favorite bread recipe. Dough that has extra yeast can compensate for potential freeze damage.
- Consider recipes high in yeast and sugar, and low in salt, which are best for freezing.
- After kneading the dough, place it in a freezer-safe package and freeze. Dough can be frozen up to four weeks.
- Thaw frozen dough at room temperature, shape, let rise and bake as directed.

Cookie dough also can be prepared and frozen to save time when baking for the holidays. Some tips for freezing cookie dough include:

- Drop cookie dough can be prepared, scooped onto a cookie sheet then frozen.
- After freezing, cookie dough can be removed from the cookie sheet and stored in freezer packaging to be baked later.
- Always remember to wash your hands after handling raw cookie dough.

Blakeslee cautioned against the urge to snack on raw cookie dough, “because of the foodborne illness risks due to eating raw flour and eggs.” Instead, she said, wait until cookies are fully cooked and cooled before enjoying.

Another holiday option: Instead of freezing dough, bake the products first, allow them to cool completely then tightly wrap them and freeze. Let them thaw in the wrapping before using.

“Rewarm baked goods with a quick zap in the microwave for that just out of the oven taste,” Blakeslee said.

Blakeslee publishes a monthly newsletter called You Asked It! that provides numerous tips on food safety. More information is also available from local extension offices in Kansas.

Choosing and Caring for Your Christmas Tree

If selecting a cut tree, watch for these signs that the tree is too far gone.

- Needles are a dull, grayish-green color
- Needles fail to ooze pitch when broken apart and squeezed
- Needles feel stiff and brittle
- Needles pull easily off tree

Once you have your tree home, recut the trunk about one inch above the original cut. This will open up clogged, water-conducting tissues. Immediately place the trunk in warm water.

Locate the tree in as cool a spot as possible. Avoid areas near fireplaces, wood-burning stoves and heat ducts as the heat will result in excess water loss. Make sure the reservoir stays filled. If the reservoir loses enough water that the bottom of the trunk is exposed, the trunk will need to be recut. Adding aspirins, copper pennies, soda pop, sugar and bleach to the water reservoir have not been shown to prolong the life of a tree.

If you choose a living Christmas tree, be sure to dig the planting hole before the ground freezes. Mulch the hole and backfill soil to keep them from freezing. Live trees should not be kept inside for more than three days. Longer periods may cause them to lose dormancy resulting in severe injury when planted outside. You may wish to tag the tree at the nursery and then pick it up a couple days before Christmas. After Christmas, move the tree to an unheated garage for several days to acclimatize it to outside temperatures. After planting, water well and leave some mulch in place to prevent the soil water from freezing and becoming unavailable for plant uptake. (Ward Upham)

Care of Christmas and Thanksgiving Cacti

Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) and Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) are epiphytes native to the jungles of South America. Epiphytic plants grow on other plants and use them for support but not for nutrients. Though these cacti are different species, they will hybridize and produce varying stem shapes. Christmas cactus normally has smooth stem segments, and Thanksgiving Cactus has hook-like appendages on each segment.

Both of these cacti prefer bright indirect light. Too much sun can result in the leaves turning yellow. Common household temperatures are fine. Soil should be kept constantly moist but not waterlogged. Give them a light fertilization every other week until winter. Blooming will normally cease in late winter to early spring, but continue to keep them moist and fertilized until fall. During the fall, stop fertilizing, and give the plants only enough water so the stems do not shrivel in order to encourage flower bud formation. Though these plants seem to flower best if kept a little pot bound, flowers will diminish if they are too crowded. If you haven't repotted in several years, or if you notice a decrease in flowering from the previous year, move the plant to a larger pot in the spring. If possible, move the plants outside for the summer. Choose a shady spot because these plants will not tolerate full sun. Leave the plants outside until frost threatens.

Normally, the plants will have received enough cool nights in the 50- to 55-degree range that flower buds will have formed. However, if they haven't, subjecting the plants

to nights greater than 12 hours long and temperatures between 59 and 69 degrees can also generate flowers. Twenty-five consecutive long nights is enough for flower initiation. Place the plants in an unused room or cover them with a dark cloth or cardboard box to insure that they receive uninterrupted darkness. After the flower buds have formed, it takes an additional nine to 10 weeks for flowers to complete development and bloom. (Ward Upham)

Firewood

Not all firewood is created equal. Some species of trees are able to produce much more heat per cord of wood. A cord is the amount of wood in a well-stacked woodpile measuring 4 feet wide by 8 feet long by 4 feet high.

Following are heat values (in million BTUs) per cord for various species of trees. The higher the value, the better the wood.

Ash, Green	22.8	
Cottonwood	15.9	
Elm, American	19.8	Difficult to split
Elm, Siberian	20.9	Difficult to split
Hackberry	21.0	
Honeylocust	25.6	
Locust, Black	28.3	Difficult to split
Mulberry	25.3	
Oak, Bur	24.9	
Osage Orange (Hedge)	32.6	Sparks, do not use in open fireplace
Walnut, Black	21.8	

The Kansas Forest Service has a publication titled "Managing Your Woodland for Firewood" that is quite helpful. See <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/mf773.pdf>.

Remember to obtain firewood locally. Emerald Ash Borer has spread in Kansas primarily because of transported wood. (Ward Upham)

Beef Records – Most Important

Speaking on a recent [Cattle Chat](#) podcast, the experts discussed key records to help in the keep-versus-cull decision.

“The differences in marketing strategies and the genetic investment will dictate how the level of performance plays in the keep or cull decision,” said Brad White, veterinarian.

Four key records include feed cost, body condition score, the number of pounds per calf weaned per exposed female and the pregnancy status of the cows.

Feed cost: “Feed is typically the largest expense in any operation, and it can have a significant impact on profit,” said Dustin Pendell, agricultural economist.

Body condition score: “It is important to write down the body condition scores of the whole herd and then adjust accordingly if there are some in the herd that are too thin,” said Bob Larson, veterinarian.

Pounds of calf weaned per exposed female: “The number of pounds of calf weaned per female exposed encompasses nutrition, genetics and reproduction, which can make it a hard record to evaluate because it isn’t one factor,” said Phillip Lancaster, nutritionist. Veterinarian Brian Lubbers agreed and added: “Measuring the weaning weight can tell you a lot about the herd.”

Pregnancy status: “Knowing her pregnancy status will help with the keep or cull decision. There is a cost to bring new animals into the herd and the longer a cow stays in the herd, the investment is extended over a greater number of years,” White said.

Counter to White’s point, however, was Larson’s belief that all cows that don’t wean a calf should be culled regardless of genetics or other factors.

“If she is open, she has to go,” Larson said.

One point that the experts were in complete agreement on was the value in having whole herd records.

“Keeping and evaluating records over time helps producers make decisions that will not only benefit their bottom line, but the success of the herd overall,” White said.

Using Old Garden Seed

Garden catalogs seem to come earlier each year. Since new seed can be expensive, you may want to consider using seed bought in previous years.

We normally consider seed will remain viable for about 3 years under cool, dark, dry, conditions though there are exceptions. For example, members of the carrot family (carrots, parsnips and parsley) are short-lived and are usually good for only 1 to 2 years. Colorado State University has a publication giving more detailed information on the longevity of specific species at <https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/storing-vegetable-and-flower-seeds-7-221/>.

If you are unsure of viability and have plenty of seed, there is an easy method of determining how good your seed is. Place 10 seeds on a paper towel moistened with warm water and cover with a second moistened towel. Roll up the towels and place inside a plastic bag with enough holes for air exchange but not so many that the towels dry quickly. Place the bag in a warm place such as the top of a refrigerator. Remoisten towels with warm water as needed. After the first week, check for germination. Remove sprouted seed and check again after another week. Add these numbers together to determine the percent germination. (Ward Upham)

Controlling Volunteer Trees

Though trees are a vital part of our landscapes, there are situations where volunteer trees need to be controlled. This is often a case of the wrong plant in the wrong place. If the tree is still small and a desirable species, you may want to consider transplanting in the spring. If it is not, active control measures would be in order.

Most, but not all, trees resprout after cutting. Cutting those that don’t resprout is an effective control method. For example, eastern redcedar is a very common species that will not resprout after cutting. Those that do resprout include Siberian elm, hackberry, Osage orange (hedgeball), oak, ash, aspen, cottonwood, maple, sycamore, willow and

many more. These trees will either need to be dug out or the cut stump treated with herbicide after cutting.

Note that when we say volunteer trees, we mean those that come from seed rather than suckers that originate from the roots of an existing tree. The recommendations given in the remainder of this article are designed to kill these volunteer trees. Using herbicides on suckers will damage and very possibly kill the original tree. Trees that commonly produce suckers include tree of heaven, honeylocust, black locust, hackberry, western soapberry, cottonwood, aspen, poplar, willow and boxelder.

It is also possible for larger trees of the same species to be root-grafted. Even though root-grafted trees are not suckers, they do share materials between the individual root systems and therefore herbicides used to treat one tree can be passed to its neighbor. Let's say we have a tree we want to control that is a volunteer and there are no other trees of the same species close enough to be root-grafted that we do not wish to harm. What do we do? If the tree is any size, you probably do not want to dig it out. That leaves using a herbicide on the cut stump. Basal treatments are also possible but that is beyond the scope of this article. First decide what herbicide to use.

Triclopyr and glyphosate are the herbicides most commonly available to homeowners. Triclopyr is found in many brush killers and glyphosate is found in Roundup as well as numerous other products. Read the label before purchasing to make sure that a cut stump treatment is listed. Most often the undiluted product or lightly diluted product is applied to the stump immediately after cutting. A paint brush is often used for the application though some people will dip their pruning shears in the products immediately before cutting. Regardless, it is important that the stump is treated immediately or at least within 5 minutes. Note that a paint brush with foam rather than bristles is less likely to drip.

Trees do not need to be actively growing to be controlled. Actually this time of year is a very good time to treat as long as applications are made when the temperature is above freezing. (Ward Upham)

Monitor Indoor Plant Temperatures

Now would be a good time to check the location of foliage houseplants to be sure the plants don't get too cold this fall or winter. Plants next to windows or in entryways near outside doors are at the greatest risk. Plants sensitive to cold temperatures include Chinese evergreen (*Algaonema*), flamingo flower (*Anthurium*), croton (*Codiaeum*), false aralia (*Dizygotheca*), and balfour aralia (*Polyscias*). Monitor and maintain temperatures above 65 degrees F for the false aralia and above 60 degrees for the rest of the list. Many other indoor plants prefer temperatures above 50 degrees. If needed, move plants away from the windows or door entrances to reduce cold temperature exposure. It may be necessary to move some plants from windowsills before shades or drapes are pulled, especially in the evening. (Ward Upham)

Conservation Trees from the Kansas Forest Service

The Kansas Forest Service offers low-cost tree and shrub seedlings for use in conservation plantings. Plants are one to two years old and sizes vary from 8 to 18 inches, depending on species. Two types of seedlings are offered; bareroot and containerized. Containerized provide a higher survival rate and quicker establishment. Orders are accepted from now through May 1st, but order early to ensure receiving the items you want.

Orders are shipped beginning in mid-March. Approved uses for these plants include windbreaks, wood lots, wildlife habitat, timber plantations and educational and riparian (streambank) plantings. They may not be used for landscape (ornamental) plantings or grown for resale.

All items are sold in units. Each single species unit consists of 25 plants. For example, a unit of Eastern red cedar has 25 trees per unit. Though a single species unit is most commonly purchased, four special bundles are also available including a quail bundle, pheasant bundle, eastern pollinator bundle and western pollinator bundle.

Tree planting accessories are also available including marking flags, root protective slurry, rabbit protective tubes, weed barrier fabric and tree tubes. If there have been problems with deer browsing on young trees, the tree tubes are a must.

For details and an order form, go to: <http://kfs.mybigcommerce.com/> or come into the Hodgeman County Extension office for an order form. (Ward Upham)