

# Horticulture Tips

## October 2017

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources  
Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture  
Oklahoma State University

### **GARDEN TIPS FOR OCTOBER!**

*David Hillock*

#### Turfgrass

- You can continue to replant or establish cool-season lawns like fescue.
- The mowing height for fescue should be lowered to approximately 2½ inches for fall and winter cutting.
- Broadleaf weeds like dandelions can be easily controlled during October ([HLA-6601](#)).
- Mow and neatly edge warm-season lawns before killing frost.

#### Ornamentals

- Plant cool-season annuals like pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, snapdragons and dusty miller when temperatures begin to cool.
- Begin planting spring-flowering bulbs like tulips, hyacinths, crocus and daffodils.
- Good companion plants for bulbs are ground covers such as ajuga, vinca, English ivy, alyssum, moneywort, thrift, phlox, oxalis and leadwort.
- Peonies, daylilies, and other spring-flowering perennials should be divided or planted now.
- Dig and store tender perennials like cannas, dahlias, and caladiums in a cool, dry location.
- Purchase trees from nurseries and garden centers at this time to select the fall color you prefer.
- Many perennials can be planted at this time and the selection is quite nice.
- Plant fall mums and asters and keep them watered during dry conditions. Don't crowd since they take a couple of years to reach maturity.
- Plant container-grown trees and shrubs this month.
- Check and treat houseplants for insect pests before bringing them indoors and repot rootbound plants.

#### Fruits & Vegetables

- Dig sweet potatoes and harvest pumpkins and winter squash.
- Remove green fruit from tomato plants when frost threatens.
- Harvest Oriental persimmons and pawpaws as they begin to change color.
- There is still time to plant radishes and mustard in the fall garden.
- Use a cold frame device to plant spinach, lettuce and various other cool-season crops for production most of the winter.

- Plant cool-season cover crops like Austrian winter peas, wheat, clover, and rye in otherwise fallow garden plots.
- Remove all debris from the garden to prevent overwintering of various garden pests.
- Start new planting bed preparations now with plenty of organic matter.

### Water Gardens

- Take tropical water garden plants indoors when water temperatures near 50 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Close the water garden for the winter by placing hardy plants in the deeper areas of the pool. Stop feeding the fish.
- Cover water gardens with bird netting to catch dropping leaves during the winter months.

## **House Plant Pests**

*David Hillock*

Insect pests can occasionally be a problem and can result in plant stress or death.

An occasional “shower” will benefit most plants. Small plants can be showered with water from the spray head at the kitchen sink, and larger plants can be showered with water in the bathtub or shower. The water spray should not be too hard, and it should be tepid in temperature. This will remove dust, dirt, and many insects and pests that might affect the plant. Always inspect plants for pests as you water and care for them.

If insects or pests are a problem, submerging the plants in a tub of water for about 30 minutes may cause the insects to rise to the surface of the water where they can be skimmed off. Enclose the pot in a plastic bag to keep the potting medium in place during this treatment.

Aphids (plant lice) and mealybugs (cottony) are common insect problems of houseplants. Insecticides properly diluted and applied will eliminate most infestations. Then, usually by early isolation and retreatment, the insect infestation can be controlled with minimum insecticide treatments.

Figures 1. Aphid (left) and mealybugs (right) are common insect problems. (Photos highly magnified.)



Spider mites can also damage houseplants. These are red, black, brown, or tan pests that are about the size of a dust particle. They usually feed from the undersides of the leaves causing the top side to turn pale. They are a greater problem during periods of high temperature and low humidity. Showering your houseplants once or twice a month will help control these tiny pests.

Figure 2. Spider mites (left, photo highly magnified) are very tiny, but can kill houseplants. Scale insects (right photo) suck plant fluids, leaving a sticky residue on nearby surfaces.



Where only a few plants are involved, an alcohol-soaked cotton swab can be used to wipe off any aphids, mealybugs, and scale insects.

Before treating houseplants with an insecticide, regardless of chemical, put them where there is plenty of ventilation. Allow them to dry thoroughly before bringing them back into the room. Always follow label directions.

Systemic insecticides formulated for homeowner use can be sprinkled in the pots with growing plants to control most insect problems. Consult your local garden center, greenhouse, or local OSU Extension Office for the latest pest control recommendations.

Do not apply pesticides without a proper reason. Read and heed all label warning and directions. Do not treat houseplants with pesticides if people with respiratory problems live in the home. Be sure to keep all pesticides and plants that have been treated with pesticides out of the reach of children and pets.

## **Cover Crops**

*David Hillock*

Cover or green manure crops are usually grown when the garden soil is idle, but are also sometimes planted between rows of fruits or vegetables to serve as a living mulch.

Cover crops are sometimes called “catch crops.” Their deep roots absorb nutrients from the soil that could otherwise leach away or be unavailable to garden crops with shorter roots. When tilled under, cover crops decompose and release those “caught” nutrients.

Some cover crops, those from the legume family, even trap and transform atmospheric nitrogen in their roots. This nitrogen serves as a fertilizer source for future crops.

Cover crops in the grass or grain family don't actively fix nitrogen, but usually create a thick mulch, produce a large amount of organic matter to be tilled under, and have deep roots that loosen compacted soils, thereby improving drainage and aeration.

Cover crops are divided into two categories: warm-season and cool-season, based on the optimum times to plant and grow.

Warm-season types will not tolerate freezing temperatures and should be planted after all danger of frost. Most take six to eight weeks (or longer) to grow large enough to turn under. An exception is buckwheat, which may need only four weeks under good growing conditions.

Cool-season cover crops will survive through the winter. They are planted in the fall, from mid-September until the end of October, and left over the winter to provide protection from soil erosion. They need to be planted early enough so their roots develop before winter but late enough so they do not complete their growing cycle (and die) before the weather gets cold.

Because they are used in rotation with other crops in the same garden location, cover crops can help suppress harmful soil nematodes. Nematodes, which are parasites, tend to be host-specific, attacking just one crop or crop family. They do not "like the taste" of other plant families and their numbers will decline without the preferred food source.

Some cover crops, just like any other crop, may attract insects that could harm other garden crops. Gardeners should watch for pest insects in cover crops and other crops and be ready to use various Earth-Kind Gardening methods while the pest problem is in its early stages.

Legumes need certain strains of bacteria to enable them to convert nitrogen gas from the air into a form that plants can use. The bacteria needed by various kinds of legumes may or may not already be in your garden soil. To be certain, legume seeds should be coated with an inoculant powder that contains living *Rhizobium* spores. Commercial inoculant is usually inexpensive and widely available. Some legume seeds are sold pretreated with the proper bacteria.

#### Cover Crop Planting Guidelines

- Prepare the soil as you would if planting vegetables. Legumes will produce the nitrogen they need, but non-legume crops will need to have nitrogen fertilizer (1 to 1-1/2 pounds of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet) added to the soil to produce maximum yields of organic matter.
- Inoculate legume seeds by moistening them, draining the excess water, adding the inoculant powder, and mixing well.
- Broadcast the seed evenly. Two to four times the rate may be used to assure a good stand.
- Cover seed with a thin layer of soil by raking it in or going over the area with a rototiller set very shallow.
- Keep the area moist until seedlings emerge. Light watering may be needed twice a day, or more, in hot weather.

- Mow and harvest cover crops before they flower and produce seeds, and till under at least 10 days to two weeks before planting garden crops.

A recommended list of cover crop species and their seeding rates can be found in the fact sheet [HLA-6436 Healthy Garden Soils](#).

## **Fall - A Good Time to Control Broadleaf Weeds**

*David Hillock*

Summer temperatures make it too risky to use the broadleaf postemergence herbicides due to the volatility and threat of drift, which could then damage desirable plants in the landscape. However, the cooler daytime temperatures associated with fall make it an excellent time to think again about controlling broadleaf weeds in the yard. Dandelion and other broadleaf weeds are easily controlled with post emergence herbicides such as those that contain a Trimec solution or other 2, 4-D formula. Remember to spray early in the day when winds are low and before temperatures begin to get too warm. Care should be used when applying these herbicides around desirable landscape plants. Do not over apply especially around tree and shrub roots. Spot spray when possible as it is not necessary to do a blanket cover spray when only few weeds actually exist in the yard. Spraying young weeds as they first appear this fall will be more effective than waiting until the foliage is more mature. Mature foliage resists the herbicide more easily than the younger shoots. Always read and follow label directions!!

## **Raking Basics**

*David Hillock*

Fall is soon upon us and it is time to begin thinking about what you will do with all those leaves. Just bagging them and letting them go to the landfill is a waste of our tax dollars and of a valuable garden resource. Instead of bagging them and hauling off to the dump this year consider these suggestions.

Use as a Mulch – An easy way to get rid of leaves is to simply rake them onto the perennial beds as a nice winter mulch. Some say that leaves may suffocate your plants -- but use your good judgment. Small leaves generally will not offer any threat but huge leaves, such as sycamore, might.

Compost Them – Place them in the compost pile along with other garden plant material. You don't need a special compost bin to accomplish this process. A big hole dug behind the garage or some other inconspicuous place works nicely. Fill the hole with lots of leaves and other garden plant material.

Mow 'Em – This is the method I like to use. I simply mow over them as often as necessary before they build up to deep. The chopped leaves return valuable organic matter and nutrients to the soil. If you use a mower with a bag attachment you can capture the chopped leaves and then

distribute them as needed. They work well as an excellent mulch, compost fodder, or can be worked into your vegetable garden.

Leaf Power – If you have tons of leaves, you may consider buying or renting a vacuum-shredder. This is more effective than just blowing them around with a blower. Vacuum-shredders suck up the leaves, chop them, and then collect them into a bag. Use as described above. Remember, however, that shredders, blowers, and choppers work well only when the leaves are nice and dry. If they're too wet, they'll just clog.

Back to Nature – If you own a wooded area or large property where you can dispose of leaves, go for it. However, remember that too many leaves can suffocate existing plants, so spread them out a bit.

## **Plant Spring-Flowering Bulbs Now!**

*David Hillock*

The latter part of this month and into November is the time to plant spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, etc. Be sure to get to the garden centers early so you can pick out the largest and healthiest of bulbs. They will bloom better for you than the smaller, discount types. Most bulbs should be planted to a depth that is about 2 times the diameter of the bulb. Be sure to plant your bulbs in well-drained soil; most will rot in our heavy, wet, clay soils during the winter if proper drainage is not provided.

To increase the spring bulb display, plant pansies at the same time. Pansies don't mind the cold weather and can even provide a little extra color during the winter months. Come spring, they really take off and provide an understory of color to the overstory of color provided by the spring bulbs.

## **Viticulture and Enology Workshop – October 24, 2017**

*Becky Carroll*

Grape growers and wine makers should make plans to attend the upcoming free workshop scheduled for Tuesday, October 24. Waddell's Vineyard & Winery near Ada will host the event. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. and the sessions will run from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Lunch will be provided so pre-registration by October 17 is required.

Morning sessions will focus on grape growing. Texas AgriLife Specialists, Dr. Justin Scheiner and Michael Cook will discuss management techniques that will be helpful to Oklahoma grape growers. Items such as cultivar selection, fruit & foliar diseases, trunk health, understanding fungicides, developing a spray program and grapevine nutrition will be interesting and beneficial to many growers.

Enology will be the focus of the afternoon. Dr. Renee Threlfall from the University of Arkansas and Luke Holcombe with Scott Labs will presenting information such as keys to quality winemaking, identifying wine sensory attributes and identifying faults and corrective actions. Winemakers are invited to bring wines that they would like to receive feedback or help in determining faults. All samples will be confidential or blind testing.

The grant for this workshop was made possible through the ODAFF Viticulture & Enology Fund. Please contact [Stephanie.larimer@okstate.edu](mailto:Stephanie.larimer@okstate.edu) or 405-744-5404 to register. For other questions, please email [Becky.carroll@okstate.edu](mailto:Becky.carroll@okstate.edu). Full schedule is available at <http://www.grapes.okstate.edu/viticulture-and-enology-workshop>.

## **Federal Marketing Order for Pecans Now in Place**

*Becky Carroll*

The Federal Marketing Order for pecan growers is now officially listed in the Department of Agriculture Rules. The 2016 crop was under voluntary assessment but will be retroactively included in the 2-3 cent assessments. The 2017 crop will be under mandatory assessment. Below is the summary from the Federal Register. Handlers will be responsible for submitting the payments.

The American Pecan Council hired Weber-Shandwick marketing firm (responsible for ‘Got milk’ and ‘Pork - Other white meat’ campaigns) and has been busy getting information ready and out to the public. The Americanpecan.com webpage features some of the items already available. They are also on twitter and facebook. Growers or consumers can sign up at the webpage for updates.

Oklahoma has great representation on the American pecan council board with several of our growers representing the central region.

**SUMMARY:** This rule implements a recommendation from the American Pecan Council (Council) to establish the initial assessment rates for the 2016–17 and subsequent fiscal years at \$0.03 per pound for improved varieties, \$0.02 per pound for native and seedling varieties, and \$0.02 per pound for substandard pecans handled under the pecan marketing order (order). The Council locally administers the order and is comprised of growers and handlers of pecans operating within the production area and a public member. Assessments upon pecan handlers will be used by the Council to fund reasonable and necessary expenses of the program. The fiscal year begins October 1 and ends September 30. The assessment rates will remain in effect indefinitely unless modified, suspended, or terminated.

**DATES:** Effective September 20, 2017.