

Horticulture Tips

September 2019

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GARDEN TIPS FOR SEPTEMBER

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Landscape

- Watch for fall specials at garden centers and nurseries since fall is a great time for planting many ornamentals.
- Choose spring flowering bulbs as soon as available.
- Plant cool-season annuals like pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, snapdragons and dusty miller when temperatures begin to cool.
- Watch for and control any late infestations of tree webworms.
- Twig girdler insects should be controlled if large numbers of small branches of elms, pecans or persimmons are uniformly girdled from the tree and fall to the ground.
- Begin to reduce the amount of light on outside tropical houseplants by placing them under shade trees before bringing them indoors for the winter.

Vegetables

- You have all of September to plant cool-season vegetables like spinach, leaf lettuce, mustard and radishes, and until the middle of September to plant rutabagas, Swiss chard, garlic and turnips.

Lawn

- Last nitrogen fertilizer application of the year on warm-season grasses should be applied no later than September 15. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Winter broadleaf weeds like dandelion will begin to emerge in late September, which is also the best time to control them with a 2, 4-D type herbicide.
- If pre-emergent control of winter-annual weeds (henbit, chickweed, annual bluegrass, etc.) is desired in lawns, the application should be completed by the second week of September.
Note: Do not treat areas that will be seeded in the fall.
- Continue bermudagrass spray program with glyphosate products for areas being converted over to tall fescue this fall.
- Plan to seed bluegrass, fescue or ryegrass as needed in shady areas in mid- to late-September. Fall is the best time to establish cool-season lawns ([HLA-6419](#)).
- White grub damage can become visible this month. Apply appropriate soil insecticide if white grubs are a problem ([EPP-7306](#)). Water product into soil.

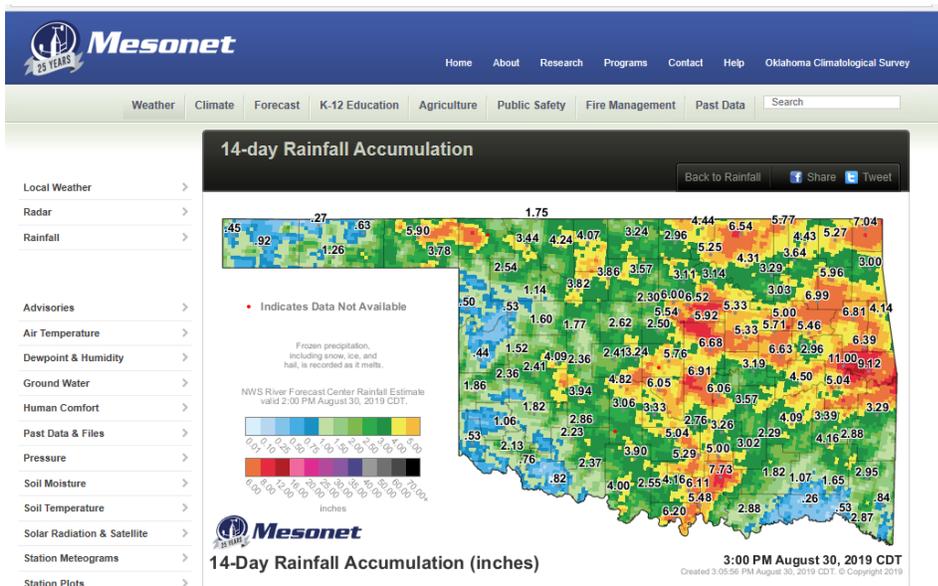
Pecan Fruit Drop

Becky Carroll, Associate Extension Specialist, Fruits & Pecans

If growers are noticing pecans on the ground at this time, it could be several things. During the water stage of kernel development, (when pecans are cut open, liquid fills the kernel) insect feeding from pecan weevil and stink bugs can cause the nuts to drop. The feeding site may be visible on the pecan shuck. After the kernels advance to the gel or dough stages, the weevil will then begin to lay eggs inside the nuts. These nuts will not drop but stay attached to the tree until harvest time. This stage from gel to dough is the critical time to apply insecticides to prevent weevil in the nuts.

Another reason for nut drop may be water split. During the end of the water stage when the shell is hardening the water pressure inside the nut can build up quickly and split the shell, seed coat and sometimes the shuck. This may happen with a rapid water uptake during a heavy rainfall or irrigation event. The water split causes the nuts to abort and drop off the tree. Looking at the Mesonet 14-day rainfall map below, it looks probable that we may see some water split problems. The shucks will develop black areas a few days after falling to the ground. It is difficult to predict water split because it is affected by cultivar, location, crop load, irrigation, and weather conditions.

Last year, embryo development problems caused pecans to drop in August. This could have been caused by pollination issues or weather conditions. Any time the pecan tree is stressed, nut drop is common. Too much water, too little water or too many nuts can result in pecans falling to the ground in August. Not a lot can be done to prevent some of these issues other than a good overall management plan to keep the trees happy.



Controlling Deer Damage

David Hillock

Oklahoma's white-tailed deer population has increased significantly over the past several decades. As the deer population expanded, deer moved into peripheral suburban areas. Increasingly, homeowners at the rural/urban interface must deal with damage to ornamental and garden plants. As deer begin moving into an area, homeowners initially enjoy seeing them and may actually encourage deer to come into their yard by feeding them. Rural subdivisions may ban hunting or place restrictions on firearm use to protect their deer or for safety reasons. Homeowner attitudes begin changing after deer numbers increase to the extent that shrubbery shows heavy browsing and gardens become difficult to grow because of continued depredation. In addition to browsing, damage may occur in the fall when bucks begin rubbing antlers on small trees or young nursery stock.

Commonly Used Control Methods – The problem of damage control is not an easy one to solve. Trapping and moving excess deer is often suggested by homeowners as a humane alternative to hunting with guns or even limited hunting with archery tackle. However, the cost to move enough deer to lower damage to tolerable levels is definitely prohibitive. It should be recognized that most areas of Oklahoma are well populated with deer. Any deer moved to another area will only shorten food supplies for both resident and transplanted animals. Nature will then control the excess through starvation or decreased reproductive success because of chronic malnutrition. At best, trapping and relocating problem deer is only a short term solution.

Deer damage control methods fit into six categories:

- 1) exclusion – by electric fence or eight-foot high, deer-proof fence
- 2) scare or frightening tactics – with tethered dogs, gas exploders, fireworks or discharging firearms
- 3) habitat modification
- 4) population reduction through sport hunting
- 5) repellents – area repellents repel by smell and contact repellents repel by taste
- 6) alternative plantings

Control methods other than an eight-foot high, deer-proof fence or an electric fence reduce damage by 50 to 75 percent at best, and often much less. A deer-proof fence does not fit well with most landscaping plans and can be expensive if large areas are to be protected. For small gardens, a deer-proof fence can be cost effective. For best results they should be constructed before serious damage occurs.

Scare tactics work for only short periods of time, but may be useful by providing enough protection to allow the crop to be harvested. Habitat modification is expensive and may actually attract deer if misapplied. A professional wildlife biologist should be consulted if this is the desired course of action. Population reduction by sport hunting is the most cost effective, long-term solution and should be seriously considered if damage is wide spread.

Repellents which provide an unpleasant taste or odor can be used, but damage will not be entirely eliminated. Effectiveness will vary with deer density, season, and availability of alternate foods. To be effective, repellents must be applied before deer begin actively browsing in the affected area. Area repellents are generally less effective than contact repellents. Research results on the relative effectiveness of area and contact repellents from several sources can be found in OSU Fact Sheet HLA-6427 – Ornamental and Garden Plants: Controlling Deer Damage. Bear in mind that repellents will not completely eliminate damage and that a given method's effectiveness will change seasonally, based on what natural foods are available to deer. Many repellents do not weather well and will need to be reapplied after a rain.

To see a list of plant material that may or may not be affected by deer or for more information on control see fact sheet [HLA-6427](#) – Ornamental and Garden Plants: Controlling Deer Damage.

Fall is for Planting Trees and Shrubs

David Hillock

Fall is an excellent time to plant most trees and shrubs. In fact research suggests that early fall planting is best for container-grown and B&B shade and ornamental trees and pines, but spring is best for planting bare-root plants and broadleaf evergreens, such as holly and Southern magnolia. Plants planted in the fall have more time for the root system to become established before the onset of summer heat. Plants installed during the growing season are susceptible to high transpiration rates leading to drying of plant tissues.

A perfect example of this was seen at the *Oklahoma Gardening*® Studio Gardens several years ago when we planted the Edible Landscape bed. One blueberry shrub was planted in the fall and then several more were planted in the spring. There was a noticeable difference between the one planted in the fall and those planted the following spring; in spite of the heat the fall planted shrub looked awesome and was barely phased by the extreme temperatures that summer. The others struggled, having crispy leaves, dropping many of them, and barely hanging on in spite of the intense watering provided to keep them alive.

So, if you need to replace a tree or shrub or want to add more to the landscape, now is the time to be looking for that perfect plant. The weather should be changing for the better as we move through the month of September, bringing cooler temperatures and additional rainfall, something we all will eagerly welcome and our plants will greatly appreciate.

Why Blanch Fruits and Vegetables for Home Processing?

David Hillock

Most recipes for canning or freezing fruits and vegetables specify a rapid initial cook prior to further processing. For example, one might dunk an ear of corn in boiling water for several minutes prior to freezing. The procedure is called blanching, a term that literally means to make white. At home it's usually accomplished with boiling water while in commercial facilities steam

is commonly used. Whatever the method, the goals are the same – to insure a higher quality finished product. At first, blanching may seem an unnecessary bother, especially for canned foods. Why cook the food twice? The answers lie in the cells of the fruits and vegetables.

As living plants respire or breathe, they generate gases – mainly oxygen and carbon dioxide. These gases are not inhaled and exhaled, but diffuse slowly into and out of a plant's cells. The result is in living plants there are many small pockets of gas throughout the plant's tissues. Since fruits live long after harvest, they too contain these gas pockets. The main reason for blanching prior to canning is to flush out these trapped gases. If this is not done, the gases will be expelled as the sealed containers are cooked. This could cause the seals to fail or jars to explode. Even if the containers remain intact, the expelled oxygen will cause a loss of quality in the canned product. This is usually seen as a brown discoloration during storage. It is the release of these trapped gases that cause a fruit or vegetable to appear brighter in color after blanching.

When fruits and vegetables are to be frozen, blanching assumes a different role. Removing the trapped gases still helps to maintain quality by getting rid of excess oxygen, but the main benefit for frozen foods is to deactivate or “kill” the enzymes that abound in living plant tissues. These enzymes, or catalytic proteins, perform a host of useful functions in live plants. Some of these are not as useful to us as consumers. Enzymes for example are responsible for the brown color that rapidly appears in cut peaches. Other enzymes can cause “grassy” or rancid flavors in corn and green beans. If these enzymes are not deactivated by heating they will continue to work, albeit very slowly, in frozen foods. For this reason most fruits and vegetables are blanched prior to freezing.

Not every fruit or vegetable requires or is suitable for blanching. Strawberries for example are seldom blanched prior to freezing because their texture and color are easily damaged by heat. But where the recipe calls for it, you'll usually get higher quality canned and frozen foods if you blanch them first. It is worth the bother. Oh, and in case you are wondering, the term blanching is derived from the practice of heating almonds in boiling water, removing the dark skins to reveal the white flesh beneath.

Tomato Ripening and Holding

David Hillock

The tomato is a perishable fruit. Once the ripening process begins it can't be completely stopped. Tomatoes ripen rapidly at temperatures of 72°F, store well at 60°F, and can be held at 55°F.

The tomato ripens from the inside out. The tomato that is called vine ripe in the trade is actually picked when pink color first shows at the blossom end.

Tomatoes will turn color and ripen in light or in the dark at proper temperatures. High temperatures (above 80°F) prevent good color and flavor development and increase the chance of decay.

In the heat of July and August in Oklahoma, tomatoes left on the plant to fully ripen tend to turn red-orange in color. To get good red color development, the tomatoes must be picked when pink color first shows on the blossom end and placed in a cooler environment. In four days, at 70 to 75°F, tomatoes will develop full red color and excellent flavor. Picking tomatoes at this stage also reduces the chances for fruit cracking and garden losses due to birds, worms, sun scald, and other causes.

For the best flavor, ripe tomatoes should not be stored in the refrigerator for any length of time. Temperatures below 55°F are damaging to the fruit. You will get top flavor if tomatoes are stored in a cool place as near 60°F as possible.