

Horticulture Tips

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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, Consumer Horticulturist

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 during 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.

Specialty Crop CFAP2 Webinar Coming Soon

Becky Carroll, Associate Extension Specialist

A Specialty Crop Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) 2 webinar is being scheduled for mid-October. This webinar will be available to help those producers with market disruptions and associated costs because of Covid-19. We felt that having a special webinar just focusing on the specialty crop growers would be beneficial. The website for program information is www.farmers.gov/cfap. This shows the details and eligible crops.

The webinar would address the program and provide a time for Q & A. We are hoping to have USDA FSA Director Scott Biggs to help with questions that may arise. There are three CFAP2 webinars already scheduled, but this one will focus on those Horticulture based crops or Specialty Crop growers.

Specialty crop groups include pecan, grape, fruit, and vegetable commercial growers but also nursery, greenhouse, cut flower and Christmas tree growers. Growers selling at farmers market, you-pick, small market gardens, and roadside are also eligible. Also qualified are those selling honey and even aquaculture. This payment will be a percentage of their 2019 sales. It is likely many people eligible to receive payments may not know about the program. They would have to set up an account with FSA if not already involved.

When the date and time is finalized, I will set up a zoom link and provide promotional materials and a news release. The CFAP2 program runs from September 21 to December 11, 2020.

Start Planning Now for Spring Fruit Tree Planting

Becky Carroll

Planning to plant a few fruit trees next Spring? Good planning is essential to successful fruit production.

The first step is to select the best site available for your trees. Your site should have good elevation. Stay away from low areas or what might be a frost pocket. Cold air, like water, flows downhill and collects in low spots making early blooming trees susceptible to frost or freeze injury. A few feet of elevation can be a few degrees difference in temperature. A couple of degrees may make the difference in a crop or no crop. The site would also benefit from a slight slope to allow that cold air to flow away from the trees. Cleaning out fencerows or overgrown plants can allow cold air to escape and not get trapped. Most all fruit trees will perform best in full sun. Stay away from large buildings or trees that may shade the new planting.

Selecting a site with well-drained soils is essential in growing peaches, nectarines and cherries. With heavier clay soils, berms or elevated areas can help with soil drainage. Many peach trees have been lost during the last few rainy springs due to “wet feet”. Apples and pears are more adapted to clay soils and are good options for areas with soils too tight for peaches.

Starting early will also improve your success. Take soil samples, adjust pH, phosphorus and potassium a year in advance. It is also important to begin weed control early. In the Fall, prior to weeds going dormant is a great time to get a jump on eliminating weeds. Weeds compete for nutrients, water, sunlight and exude alleopathic compounds from the roots that reduce growth of surrounding plants. They also can harbor pests - insects, disease and wildlife. After planting, the use of mulches can assist with both weed control and retaining soil moisture. Note that on wet years, mulching peaches can be detrimental by holding too much water.

Ordering trees early will help to assure that variety and rootstock wanted are available. Find a nursery that specializes in fruit for best selection and quality trees. Waiting until the spring may reduce options and the quality received. Ask the nursery to ship on a date close to planting, usually mid-February to March is good bare root planting time. For green growing plants and more cold-sensitive plants (like figs), waiting until after the frost-free date is best.

Deciding on what to plant is not easy. Make sure to check adaptability of varieties to location, both for winter hardiness, flowering or bud break dates and chilling hour requirements. Match varieties with local sites. What will grow well in Northeastern Oklahoma may not be adapted to Southwestern parts of the state and vice versa. Does the tree need a complimentary variety or two for pollination or is the tree self-fruitful? Make sure that the pollinators are planted in proximity. Many nursery catalogs will indicate varieties that work well together, and pollination charts are available online.

Choose varieties that are disease resistant. Many problematic diseases can be negated by choosing varieties that are resistant. Fruit trees have enough diseases to manage without having to deal with those that are best controlled with resistance. For peaches, don't select varieties that are susceptible to bacterial leaf spot. For apples and pears, varieties can be used that are resistant to rusts, scab, and fire blight. If the tree selected is susceptible, a spray schedule should be used to protect the tree.

Rootstock selection is important especially on apple. Knowing what rootstock is used will indicate plant spacing, and ease of management and harvest. A standard apple tree is more

difficult to maintain versus a dwarf or semi-dwarf selection. Be aware that dwarf trees may require support or trellising. But if space is limited, using dwarf rootstocks can be helpful. Never buy an apple without rootstock identification or at least a size reference. Peach trees can be maintained a manageable size by proper pruning.

Probably the most important selection criteria is personal preference. Each peach, apple or pear variety will taste different and will produce varied quality. Be sure to know what is being purchased. Do research, talk to others growing fruit trees and see what works for them.

Growing fruit is a very satisfying hobby but can be challenging. Prepare the best site, choose variety and rootstock combinations that are adapted and plan to maintain with good management for best outcomes.

Soil Testing for Vegetable Crops

David Hillock

A soil test is a chemical analysis that estimates a soil's ability to supply nutrients. Results from a soil test allow you to monitor soil chemical conditions, tap existing nutrient supplies, identify nutrient deficiencies, and apply optimum fertilizer amounts.

Now is the time to start thinking about next year's garden or commercial vegetable crop. Soil testing for next year's crops should be done at this time, so that any needed adjustments can be made prior to next spring. The best way to ensure that you get full value from fertilizer is to make sure the pH is ideal. For most vegetable crops, an ideal pH is between 6.0 and 6.5. If lime is needed to raise the pH, it should be added in the fall. While lime may start to react as soon as it is applied, several months are required for it to completely react. If the pH is too low, fertilizers cannot be as effective as they should be. For more information on soil testing see [L-249 Soil Testing...the Right First Step](#).

Season Extenders

David Hillock

To get the most out of a garden, you can extend the growing season by sheltering the plants from the cold weather in early spring and during fall. Very ambitious gardeners harvest greens and other cool-season crops all winter by providing the right conditions. There are many ways to lengthen the growing season; your choice depends on the amount of time and money you want to invest.

Cold Frames and Hot Beds – Cold frames, sun boxes and hot beds are relatively inexpensive, simple structures that provide a favorable environment for growing cool-season crops in early spring, fall and even into winter months. Some are elaborate and require a large investment but may be the



best option for those who are serious about having fresh vegetables during winter.

Cold frames and sun boxes have no outside energy requirements, relying on the sun for their source of heat. Hot beds are heated by soil heating cables, steam-carrying pipes or fresh, straw-filled manure buried beneath the rooting zones of plants. Heat is collected by these frames when sunlight penetrates the sash made of clear plastic, glass or fiberglass.

To ensure good drainage and maximum solar absorption, the ideal location for a cold frame is a southern or southeastern exposure with a slight slope. A sheltered spot with a wall or hedge to the north will provide protection against winter winds. Sinking the frame slightly into the ground also provides protection by using the earth for insulation. A walkway in front of the frame, adequate space behind the frame to remove the sash and weights to raise and lower the glass sashes make using a frame easier. Some cold frames are lightweight enough to move between sections of the garden. Another possibility is the Dutch light, which is a large, portable, greenhouse-like structure that can be moved from place to place.

Passive solar energy storage is utilized in cold frame design. For example, barrels painted black and filled with water absorb heat during the day and release it at night. The solar pod provides this type of heat storage. Other cold frame designs are very well-insulated and have a high back and a steep glass slope. Some have movable insulation that is folded up during the day and folded down at night or during extremely cold weather to protect growing plants.



A cold frame is also useful in early spring to harden-off seedlings which were started indoors or in a greenhouse. This hardening-off period is important as seedlings can suffer serious setbacks if they are moved from the warmth and protection of the house directly to the garden. The cold frame provides a transition period for gradual adjustment to outdoor weather. It is also possible to start cool-weather crops in a cold frame, either transplanting them to the garden or letting them grow to maturity in the frame.

Fall is a good time to sow some cool-season crops in frames. With adequate moisture and fertilization, most cool-season crops will continue to grow through early winter in the cold frame's protected environment. Depending on the harshness of winter and whether additional heating is used, your frame may continue to provide fresh greens, herbs and root crops throughout cold winter months.

Growing frames can be built with a variety of materials, but wood and cinder blocks are the most common. Wooden frames are not difficult to build. Use decay-resistant wood, such as high-quality cypress, or choose pressure-treated wood. Kits are commercially available and can be easily assembled; some kits even contain automatic ventilation equipment.

There is no standard size for a cold frame. Frame dimensions depend on the amount of available space, desired crops, the size of the window sash, and the permanency of the structure. Do not make the structure too wide for weeding and harvesting; 4 to 5 feet is about the maximum width

to comfortably reach across. The frame sash should be sloped southward for maximum sunlight exposure and absorption.

Insulation may be necessary if a sudden cold snap is expected. A simple method is to throw burlap sacks filled with leaves over the frame sash at night to protect plants from freezing. Another method is to stack bales of straw or hay against the frame.

Ventilation is most critical from late fall through early spring on clear, sunny days when temperatures rise above 45°F. The sash should be partially raised to prevent the buildup of extreme temperatures inside the frame. Lower or replace the sash early enough to conserve some heat for evening.

It is possible to convert a cold frame to a hot bed. For a manure-heated bed, remove 2 feet of soil (for better drainage, remove more soil and add a layer of gravel). Add an 18-inch layer of straw-filled horse manure and then cover with 6 inches of good soil. For an electric-heated bed, remove 8 or 9 inches of soil. Place thermostatically controlled electric cable in 6 to 8-inch loops on the soil, evenly spacing the cable but not allowing it to cross itself. Cover the cable with 2 inches of sand or soil, and then place hardware cloth on top to protect the cable. Finally, cover this with 4 to 6 inches of good soil.

High Tunnel Onion Transplant Production

Jim Shreffler, Ph.D., Area Extension Horticulture Specialist, SE District

Onions are a popular crop with many Oklahoma gardeners and vegetable farmers. Being one of the earliest planted warm-season crops, onions are often the “kick start” of the gardening season. Typically, we grow short day and intermediate day varieties, which refers to relative initiation time of onion bulb formation, which can be 3 or so weeks earlier for commonly used short day types. Plantings are usually established using bare-rooted transplants which generally appear in garden shops around early February. One limitation to this plant source is that a rather limited number of varieties is usually available. Some that have performed very well in recent trials in Oklahoma will not likely be found for sale as transplants. These include the intermediate day red varieties Monastrell and Cabernet and the yellow variety Ovation. Without a plant source, these varieties would not be readily accessible to Oklahoma growers unless they can grow their own plants. Using protected culture is one way to do this. A method for growing onion transplants in a high tunnel has been developed for our area and involves seeding onions at a high planting density in the fall to be harvested as transplants in late February or March. Steps for planting onions from mid-October to November in a high tunnel are as follows:

1. Prepare a frame that can be filled with a five-inch-deep layer of clean, weed-free sand. Before filling with sand, line the frame with a tightly woven, water permeable, landscape fabric. Be sure that the frame and the final sand bed surface will be level and uniform.
2. Seed onions in rows spaced 6 inches apart. Using rows rather than scattering seed facilitates management and plant harvest. Seed should be planted in small furrows and covered about one half to three quarter inch deep at about 50 seeds per foot of row.

3. Watering is critical to obtain uniform and most rapid seed germination. Onion seeds germinate slowly, and gentle daily watering is needed to prevent the sand from getting dry. As seedlings begin to emerge, watch for grasshoppers and caterpillars that may feed on plants. The bed can be covered with a light fabric row cover to exclude insects and to slow sand drying.
4. Once seedling emergence is complete, begin watering weekly with fish emulsion. This nutrient source seems to work well beginning at plant emergence and throughout the winter months. Adjust application rate and frequency as needed to maintain good plant color since nutrient needs increase as plants get larger.
5. Allow plants to grow through the winter months. In the event that weeds appear, they can be pulled easily from the sand. Once plants are well established, an occasional gentle “cultivation” of sand between plant rows may help to permit rapid water infiltration. Onion plants in a closed tunnel can tolerate normal Oklahoma winter temperatures. In the event of prolonged periods of low teen temperatures, it may be beneficial to cover with a frost blanket material.
6. Onion plants should be ready for removal from the tunnel by late February. Unlike bare-rooted transplants, these plants are in active growth and should be pulled when ready for placement in the garden. Pull plants by gently grabbing a group of plants and pulling gently. If necessary, gently loosen sand below plants as they are lifted and then shake to remove excess sand. If temperatures begin to warm up at this time, open the house to allow for plants to harden before pulling and transplanting. If taken from a warm house environment and placed in cold, windy outdoor conditions there may be excess transplant shock. If handled with care, roots will continue to function after transplanting. Plant by making a furrow and allowing roots to remain extended as they are covered. For mechanical transplanting, roots may need to be clipped to about 2 inches long.

In summary, this simple method for growing onion transplants will allow growers to use onion varieties that may not be available as commercially grown transplants. The method not only assures having the desired varieties but also gives the grower more control over plant quality as possibilities of diseases found occasionally on purchased transplants is avoided. In addition, during more than ten years of growing onions in southern Oklahoma using hoop house grown transplants very little incidence of onion plant bolting, the formation of seed stalks rather than large onion bulbs, has been encountered. And finally, for organic growers, this method provides a cost-effective transplant source, as most commercially grown transplant sources cannot be used in certified organic production.



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.

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.

Making a Pumpkin Pot

Casey Hentges, Oklahoma Gardening Host

Have you noticed the air is getting crisper in the mornings and we are losing our daylight? We all know what that means... Fall is here. And like many other people this is one of my favorite times of the year for many different reasons – of course because OSU football and secondly because it is the beginning of the holiday season and time to start working on the decorations.

Fall pumpkin planters are an easy fall decoration that everyone in your family can help with. You will need a knife, a drill, a stick, potting soil, a round pumpkin, and a mum that is appropriately sized for your pumpkin.

Start just like you would start carving a pumpkin and cutting out the lid. Next clean out the seeds from the inside - this is where the kids come in handy. After the pumpkin is cleaned out, drill a few of holes in the bottom of it to allow for drainage. Take the mum out of its container and check to see if it will fit in the hollowed-out pumpkin. If it is slightly too large you can shave down the rootball a bit. Even when you have to do this, there will be extra room inside the pumpkin that you will need to fill in with potting soil due to the curve of the pumpkin. Use the stick to help get the potting soil down around the rootball. If your mum is too short and falling down in the pumpkin, you can add more potting soil underneath it to help lift it up. Once you have the mum firmly planted in the pumpkin you need to give it a drink of water.

The best thing about these Halloween decorations is there is no storage from year to year. Once the season has come to an end, you can take your mum pumpkin container out to the garden and plant it right into the ground, pumpkin and all. A word of caution though, if you do not clean out all the pumpkin seeds you may find a few vines growing in your garden next season.

You can do this with almost any size pumpkin, so if you want a bigger display you can use a larger pumpkin or if you want the kids to be able to do their own the little 6” mums work great for that.

Just like decorating or carving a pumpkin the more you do, the more creative you can get. You can also experiment with using other plants such as ornamental grass to create hair for jack-o'-lantern, small ornamental cabbage for eyes, or using trailing sedum for a drooling mouth.

If you don't want to make a whole face out of carving the pumpkin, you can also use different plants for hair and then draw on a face with a marker.

If you've been meaning to get your kids out into the garden and get their hands dirty, it isn't too late. This is a fun activity to incorporate into your holiday decorations.

Oklahoma Gardening Video - <https://youtu.be/yVQTMWdf6Yg>

Re-flowering Your Poinsettias for Christmas

David Hillock

If you have managed to keep your poinsettia plant healthy during the summer by proper watering, fertilization, and grooming you are probably ready for the challenge of getting your poinsettia to re-flower.

If you have been growing your poinsettias in the garden during the summer, lift the pots from the flower garden or shrub border in late September. Bring the plants inside and place them in a sunny window. Avoid “burning” light, but do not give too much shade or leaf drop, spindly growth, and sparse blooming may result; water as needed, avoiding extremes of underwatering or overwatering.

Use a house plant fertilizer during this indoor forcing period, following the manufacturer’s recommendations relative to rate and frequency. Do not apply more fertilizer than recommended.

Poinsettias must have long, uninterrupted nights to bloom and in order for the plants to flower for Christmas, they should be kept in complete darkness from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. each night, beginning in late September, placing them back in the sunny window each day. This can be as simple as placing the plant every evening in a light-proof box or in a closet. Follow this procedure until good bract color is showing. If possible, the temperature should remain between 60°F to 70°F. Whether you prefer trying to re-flower your poinsettia or purchase another the following Christmas, enjoy the poinsettia’s flaming beauty each year. This living symbol of a joyous season is a colorful part of the American Christmas tradition.