

Horticulture Tips

December 2020

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

GARDEN TIPS FOR DECEMBER!

David Hillock, Consumer Horticulturist

Lawn & Turf

- Remove leaves from cool-season grasses or mow with a mulching mower. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Continue mowing cool-season lawns on a regular basis. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Continue to control broadleaf weeds in well-established warm- or cool-season lawns with a post-emergent broadleaf weed killer.

Tree & Shrubs

- Select a freshly cut Christmas tree. Make a new cut prior to placing in tree stand. Add water daily.
- Live Christmas trees are a wise investment, as they become permanent additions to the landscape after the holidays.
- Light prunings of evergreens can be used for holiday decorations. Be careful with sap that can mar surfaces.

Flowers

- Apply winter mulch to protect rose bush bud unions and other perennials. Wait until after several early freezes or you will give insects a good place to winter.
- Poinsettias must have at least six hours of bright, indirect light daily. Keep plants away from drafts.

Fruits & Nuts

- Cover strawberry plants with a mulch about 3-4 inches thick if plants are prone to winter injury.
- Wait to prune fruit trees until late February or March.

General

- Keep all plants watered during dry conditions even though some may be dormant. Irrigate all plantings at least 24 hours before hard-freezing weather if soil is dry. ([HLA-6404](#))
- Order gardening supplies for next season.
- Now is a great time to design and make structural improvements in your garden and landscape.

- Send for mail-order catalogs if you are not already on their mailing lists.
- Christmas gift ideas for the gardener might include tools, garden books and magazine subscriptions.
- Clean and fill bird feeders.
- Make sure indoor plants are receiving enough light or set up an indoor fluorescent plant light.
- Till garden plots without a cover crop to further expose garden pests to harsh winter conditions.
- Visit your county extension office to obtain gardening fact sheets for the new gardening season.
- Join a horticulture, plant or urban forestry society and support community “greening” or “beautification” projects.
- Review your garden records so you can correct past mistakes. Purchase a new gardening journal or calendar to keep the New Year’s gardening records.

GARDEN TIPS FOR JANUARY!

- If precipitation has been deficient (1” of snow = ~ 1/10” of water), water lawns, trees, and shrubs, especially broadleaf and narrowleaf evergreens. Double check moisture in protected or raised planters.
- Check on supplies of pesticides. Secure a copy of current recommendations and post them in a convenient place. Dilution and quantity tables are also useful.
- If you did not treat young pines for tip borers in November, do so before March.
- Check that gardening tools and equipment are in good repair—sharpen, paint, and repair mowers, edgers, sprayers and dusters.
- Inspect your irrigation system and replace worn or broken parts.
- Control overwintering insects on deciduous trees or shrubs with dormant oil sprays applied when the temperature is above 40°F in late fall and winter. Do not use “dormant” oils on evergreens. ([EPP-7306](#))
- A product containing glyphosate plus a postemergent broadleaf herbicide can be used on dormant bermudagrass in January or February when temperatures are above 50°F for winter weed control.

Oklahoma Grown Christmas Trees

David Hillock

The best way to ensure that you are getting a fresh Christmas tree is to buy one directly from one of the many Christmas tree farms in Oklahoma. Each one offers a different experience, but one that is always a fun and memorable one for the family. Some of the farms offer more than just Christmas trees – wreaths, garland, table decorations and gifts may be available too. To make the experience more memorable, some also offer free hot cider, hot chocolate, coloring books and candy canes as well as children’s activities.

The Oklahoma Christmas Tree Association website, <http://www.okchristmastrees.com>, provides a list of farms currently selling Christmas trees as well as other information. These Oklahoma grown trees are beautiful, fresh, green Christmas trees which were carefully planted and nurtured for years specifically for you this Christmas.

Once you get your live tree home, it should be placed in water as soon as possible so it won't dry out. A tree purchased from a Choose & Cut farm should be placed in water as soon as you get home. Do not let the stump dry out or you will have to make a fresh cut. A new tree will take up quite a bit of water the first few days so be sure to check the container or tree stand frequently and keep it full of water. Never let your tree get dry or it quickly becomes a hazard.

CFAP2 Deadline Approaching

Becky Carroll, Associate Extension Specialist, Fruit & Pecans

Specialty Crop Growers should be aware of the December 11, 2020 deadline for Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2) payments. This affects pecan, grape, herb, vegetable, fruit, spice, nursery, greenhouse, cut flower, honey and aquaculture growers. The USDA provided an additional \$14 billion for agricultural producers facing market disruptions and associated costs due to Covid 19. Growers should be sure to apply for these benefits by the deadline and contact their local FSA office for assistance.

Here is a link to an informational zoom meeting held in October to address program details, eligibility, and how to apply. Dr. Amy Hagerman, OSU Ag and Food Policy Specialist and Josh Lundy, FSA, presented the program for producers.

https://youtu.be/2z_qWJJJaSMQ

Possible Ice Storm Damage Assistance with ECP

Becky Carroll

Pecan growers in many counties across the state were greatly affected by the October 26-27 ice storm. Recently the state FSA office sent out information about the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) that may benefit growers recovering from the recent ice storm. The ECP is set up to assist with damage to agricultural land from weather events like the ice storm, tornadoes, and wildfires. Details to participate are important and the FSA office should be contacted **prior** to clean-up with any disaster event. An FSA representative will come out to assess the damage and discuss which damage is eligible for reimbursement. This program will not be widely publicized, but it is left up to the affected growers to contact their FSA office to check on eligibility and to request the program in their county. The county FSA committee will determine whether or not the program should be initiated.

Documentation will be key to getting assistance. The FSA office will not cover any costs that were not inspected prior to the start of cleanup. The program is designed to help producers pay

for damage that they would not be able to pay for by any other means (insurance or conservation programs). ECP is only for commercial agricultural producers, and only applies to agricultural land. Producers will need to understand the eligible expenses and how to document properly to recover these costs. All restored practices must meet NRCS standards and specifications.

Many growers began cleanup soon after the ice damage in October occurred and may not be eligible for assistance but with documentation in photos or video, it wouldn't hurt to contact the local county office. Those that did not begin cleanup, will have an easier case for help.

Emergency conservation practices that may be implemented include debris removal; grading, shaping, releveling; restoration of fences; restoring conservation structures.

Ineligible expenses include fuel costs (diesel, gas, etc.); mileage; maintenance; equipment purchases; equipment repair; work clothing (hats, gloves, etc.).

For more information, contact the local FSA office or Dr. Amy Hagerman, OSU Ag and Food Policy Specialist.

Tree Assistance Program Available to Help with Commercial Tree Loss

Becky Carroll

Another assistance program available for pecan growers in the state include the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). TAP is offered to eligible commercial growers that have experienced tree mortality in excess of 18 percent due to a natural disaster. TAP is also available to other type of orchards, vineyards, and nursery tree growers. Tree, vine or bush mortality must exceed 18% to qualify. Those affected must contact their county FSA office to apply for assistance within 90 of the disaster or when the loss is apparent.

Reimbursement will be for the cost of replanting and/or rehabilitating trees damaged, in excess of 18% mortality. For those lost trees, payment can be made for replanting and the cost of replacement trees, vines or bushes. The payment will be set as the lesser of up to 65% of actual cost of the practice or the total amount, calculated using rates established by FSA for the practice.

For damaged trees, reimbursement can be made for the cost of pruning, removal or other costs incurred for salvaging existing trees, bushes or vines, or in the case of mortality, to prepare the land to replant trees, bushes or vines. The payment will be set as the lesser of 50% of the actual cost of the practice or the total amount, calculated using rates established by FSA for the practice.

Eligible producers are not required to own the land where trees, bushes or vines are planted and an individual or entity who planted or is a successor to trees through legal ownership and receives commercial benefit shall be considered an eligible owner for TAP.

Poinsettia Care

David Hillock

Newer cultivars of poinsettia, in addition to being very showy, have excellent keeping quality and stronger stems than older cultivars. When buying your poinsettia, choose a plant with well-expanded, well-colored bracts. Foliage should be medium to dark green with uniform coloring. Flowers should be present in the center of the bracts.

After you purchase your plant, do not expose it to chilling temperatures or cold drafts of air. If the temperature outdoors is below 50°F do not carry an unwrapped plant from the retail shop to your car. In the home or other place of display, avoid cold drafts and excessive heat from heating ducts, TV sets or large incandescent lamps. Temperatures of 70°F or below (down to 55°F) are desirable to retain best bract color. Large plants can be placed on the floor if light is adequate.

Light plays an important role in retention of leaves on the plant. Place the plant in an area where it receives at least six to eight hours of direct natural or artificial light. A minimum of 75 foot candles is desirable where possible. This would be similar to the minimum light intensity required for good desk lighting in an office. Incandescent lights such as those found in most homes will give a truer, brighter bract color than most types of fluorescent light.

Poinsettias can be displayed with other houseplants. The adjacent plants raise the humidity and allow poinsettias to last longer. Also, the regular houseplants can be spruced up for the holidays.

Many commercial growers use non-soil mixes of sphagnum peat, pine bark, vermiculite, perlite, or similar ingredients. When plants are grown in such non-soil mixes, it is sometimes difficult to decide when the plant needs water. If there is no heavy component (sand or soil) in the mix and a plastic pot is used, the pot can be lifted to determine its weight. If the plant is heavy, there is usually plenty of moisture in the pot; if it is lightweight, the medium is dry and a thorough watering should be given. Moisture needs can also be assessed by feeling the growing medium in the pot. Water when the top of the growing medium is starting to feel dry, but do not allow too much drying. Slight wilting of the plant is not harmful, but avoid severe wilting, which will cause leaves to drop.

Water the plant thoroughly. Make sure a small amount of water drips through the drainage holes of the container. If the plant is wrapped with decorative foil, punch a hole in the foil beneath the pot to allow excess water to escape. The plant should be placed on a saucer to prevent damage to the furniture or carpet.

Do not water the plant too frequently when the soil or growing mix is already wet or this may result in roots suffocating from lack of oxygen, causing the leaves to wilt, yellow, and drop.

Recent research has shown that poinsettias are not poisonous, but the plants are intended solely for ornamental purposes. Some people are allergic to the milky sap and may develop a rash when

exposed to the sap. Avoid breaking the leaves and stems, as this will release the sap. It is wise to keep any houseplant out of the reach of small children and pets.

Making Living Decorations

Casey Hentges, Oklahoma Gardening Host

This time of year, the gardening can feel like a distant memory and we start to crave anything green. Looking around your garden, you may see a graveyard of empty sad pots, but there is no reason they need to look like this for your holiday guests.

If you have a lot of pots, consider storing some of them away and maybe just work with the ones that are more permanent or are too heavy to move.

There are several ways to approach decorating your winter containers, and there is no right or wrong way, instead use what you have available to you. Go out to the garden and gather some plant material that may be remaining. Dried hydrangea flowers, deciduous holly branches with these berries, red and yellow twig dogwood sticks, horse apples that come of the bois d'arc tree, pinecones, lotus pods, sycamore branches, ornamental grasses, magnolia leaves, and curly willow all work great to add some interest.

As you look through the garden, you will find there is a lot of natural color still available in the garden. However, if you don't have access to a lot of different plants, you can just as easily gather some old sticks and spray paint them.

If you a stronger green presence in your pots that is going to last longer; therefore, if you don't have any evergreen you may consider planting a small evergreen. A boxwood or juniper shrub are fairly cheap and easy to care for options. You can just sink these down in your container and then add some of the other branches into it to jazz it up even more for you guests. For an even more festive look, consider adding burlap bows, shatterproof Christmas ornaments, birdcages or decorative lanterns. It is just that easy and you have an instant, beautiful floral display to greet your holiday visitors.

Oklahoma Gardening Video - <https://youtu.be/CBaauWT6U2A>

Tool Cleanup and Sharpening

David Hillock

This is a good time to clean and sharpen tools before storing them for the winter. A little time now will ensure that they are ready to go as soon as it warms up in the spring. Shovels and hoes can be cleaned, sharpened at a 45-70-degree angle and coated with oil to prevent rust. If the tool has a wooden handle, it can be coated with a layer of boiled linseed oil to keep it weatherproof. Tools such as pruners, loppers and saws should be sharpened professionally unless you have the proper equipment to sharpen them.

As mowers are put away for the season, one of the more important maintenance practices suggested is to sharpen that blade! Studies have shown that some of the problems we have with weakened lawns may not be due to environmental stresses but can be directly linked with failure to keep the mower blade sharp. A dull mower blade rips the grass, instead of cutting it cleanly. The ripping action makes a long, slow healing wound that makes disease invasion more pervasive. It can also lead to extensive tip dieback of the grass blade itself that reduces the effective photosynthetic area left to the grass following a cut.

Mower blades should be sharpened on a regular basis, and there is no better time to do it than as that mower is stored for the winter. This ensures that the first cut is a good “sharp” one!

Don't Forget to Water this Winter

David Hillock

Lack of adequate soil moisture is often a major cause of winter damage. Dry soil coupled with strong winter winds can cause havoc on a plant. All plants, but especially narrowleaf and broadleaf evergreens, use water during winter. When little or no soil moisture is present, plants can become desiccated and it is more likely root damage will also occur.

When dry cold fronts are predicted, water the landscape at least 24 hours in advance of the front. Apply about ½ inch of water at the time of watering. A sunny day on moist soil helps warm the soil and root area thus reducing the amount of time the roots will be exposed to cold temperatures.

Moisture must be available below the frost line or frozen soil. When the soil freezes, if moisture is not present in soil pore spaces, moisture is pulled from plant roots to form the ice crystals resulting in desiccated roots, thus what some would refer to as “winter kill.”

Of course, some common sense needs to be practiced at this time of year; do not allow the sprinklers to come on during a hard freeze. Ice forming on some plants could result in some serious damage and you could create a hazardous situation for you, pedestrians, or even passing vehicles.

Too much water can also result on problems during the winter. Cold wet soils can lead to rotting roots. Soils with more than ample moisture may also encourage winter weeds to germinate and flourish. Water only every three to four weeks and apply only enough water to moisten the top six or so inches of soil.

Do not forget plants growing in aboveground planters protected from rain. They need watering even in a wet season. Also, remember to water plants that are located under the eaves of a building or home since they often receive little natural precipitation.

The Winter Landscape

David Hillock

The winter can be a true test of the strength of a landscape design. With most of the landscape plants resting during the winter months, things of interest may be scarce. A key element in landscape design to sustain it year-round is the hardscape – those nonliving materials often used to establish the framework and backbone of the garden. A good hardscape will be pleasing, functional and provide interest during the winter months when many plants are dormant.

Hardscape materials include rock, pavers, concrete, wood, etc. These materials are used to create pathways, walls, fences, borders, benches, arbors, sculptures and other structures. Using hardscape materials that are naturally found in your area, such as native stone, will help it tie into the natural surroundings. Using materials that are complementary to the materials used to build the home helps tie the home and landscape together. The landscape then becomes an extension of the home as well.

Many plants also provide interest during winter months. Evergreen trees and shrubs hold their leaves and colors year-round and contribute form, texture, and mass to the garden. Some deciduous trees and shrubs have interesting or colorful bark that can be seen easier and be more appreciated after the leaves have fallen. There are also several species that produce colorful fruits that persist into the winter months and may provide food for wildlife as a bonus. Herbaceous perennials may contribute to the winter landscape as well with their dried seed heads and interesting forms and shapes. Ornamental grasses are particularly attractive as they take on neutral colors and sway back and forth in the breeze.

As we move into the winter months, it is a good time to evaluate the landscape and identify its strengths and weaknesses. It is also an excellent time to work on the hardscape features of the garden. Need some inspiration? There are several excellent websites, books and magazines full of creative design ideas. These books and magazines make great Christmas gifts for the avid gardener in the family too.

Feeding Birds

David Hillock

It's time to remember our fine, feathered friends for the winter months. If you already have birdfeeders, it's a good time to clean them. Wash them in soapy water, then rinse in a 10% bleach solution and allow to dry completely.

It's important to match your birdfeeders to the type of bird you want to attract. Smaller birds such as chickadee, tufted titmouse, and finches prefer the tube feeders. Larger birds such as cardinals and blue jays prefer hopper or platform feeders, and birds such as the morning dove eat seed on the ground. Just as people prefer different types of food, birds prefer different types of food. Thistle and black oil sunflowers are good for smaller birds, cardinals like sunflowers of all types and millet is good for ground feeding birds. A good general bird feeding mix is white proso millet and black oil sunflower. Suet is good for woodpeckers and nuthatches.

Water is also an important feature, not only for the birds to drink, but also to keep them clean as clean feathers insulate better from the cold weather. If you have a birdbath heater, be sure that it will shut off automatically when the water reaches about 40°F, so it doesn't get too warm. It is also important to keep the water and the birdbath clean. For more information on attracting birds to the landscape see the OSU Extension Fact Sheet [HLA-6435](#) Landscaping and Gardening for Birds.

Oh Persimmon Tree!!

Lynn Brandenberger, Extension Specialist

Oh persimmon tree, persimmon tree how lovely are thy branches
Festooned with fruit that are so sweet to make me so excited!
If I can wait until first frost, I know that fruit will not be lost
Because I know that after that the fruit will be delicious!
(To the tune of O' Christmas Tree)

Crazy I know, but I really like the American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)! I was first introduced to this culinary treat by my dear old Dad, who brought home a whole basket of persimmon fruit and asked me if I wanted one. Being the ever hungry child that I was, it was with excitement that I popped one into my mouth and was rewarded with a super puckered-up mouth and lips. After a few minutes had passed and the puckering had settled down my Dad then began to explain that persimmons need to be ripened before eating! Long story short, I then began my long vigil awaiting a properly ripened persimmon.



Now I know that it takes a hard freeze to properly ripen a native persimmon. As I travel through Oklahoma I'm constantly on alert to spot native persimmon trees with fruit and mentally mapping where they are for reference after the first hard frost! My loving wife does not quite understand this obsession, but she is very tolerant of it.

American persimmon is often found in small forested lots or alongside the road. This species is dioecious meaning it generally has male and female trees. Leaves are simple, arranged alternately along the branch and vary from oval to elliptical. As with anything that you are considering eating, it is important to know exactly what you are about to consume. I would suggest going to the woods with an experienced persimmon eater so you can learn the finer points of persimmon identification.

Persimmon fruit can be consumed straight off the tree (after the first hard frost), can be dried or cooked. Being the lazy fellow that I am, I prefer my fruit fresh from the tree which I consume outdoors since spitting persimmon seeds is part of the fun. Non-ripe persimmons can be ripened by placing them in close proximity to other fruits that give-off ethylene like bananas, apples, etc.

Horticulture Tips – 2020 Index

Applying Dormant Oils for Winter Insect Control, 02/2020
Armadillo Control, 08/2020
Bagworms, 05/2020
Bagworms on Fruit & Pecan Trees, 08/2020
Bulbs for Spring Color, 11/2020
Controlling Winter Annual Weeds, 09/2020
Common Questions about Composting, 04/2020
Control Peach and Nectarine Leaf Curl Now!, 02/2020
Controlling Broadleaf Winter Weeds in Home Lawns, 11/2020
Cutting Back Ornamental Grasses, 03/2020
Diagnosing Problems in the Landscape and Garden, 07/2020
Dividing Perennials, 08/2020
Don't Bag It!, 06/2020
Don't Forget to Water this Winter, 12/2020
Establishing a New Vegetable Garden, 03/2020
Fall Cleanup, 11/2020
Fall Gardens, 08/2020
Fall Gardening, 08/2020
Fall Planting Guide, 08/2020
Feeding Birds, 12/2020
Fertilizing Asparagus, 02/2020
Fresh Spring Vegetables, 02/2020
Fruit Tree Establishment, 03/2020
Forcing Spring Flowering Shrubs for Indoor Beauty, 02/2020
Garden Preparations for Winter, 09/2020
Garden Tips for February, 02/2020
Garden Tips for March, 03/2020
Garden Tips for April, 04/2020
Garden Tips for May, 05/2020
Garden Tips for June, 06/2020
Garden Tips for July, 07/2020
Garden Tips for August, 08/20
Garden Tips for September, 09/2020
Garden Tips for October, 10/2020
Garden Tips for November, 11/2020
Garden Tips for December and January, 12/2020
Growing Fall Irish Potatoes, 08/2020
Growing Seedlings, 02/2020
Hellebores, 03/2020
High Tunnel Onion Transplant Production, 10/2020
Houseplant Care, 11/2020
House Plant Pests, 10/2020

Keeping Your Shovels and Hand Trowels Clean, 08/2020
Leaf Sampling for Pecan Fruit Trees, 07/2020
Making a Pumpkin Pot, 10/2020
Making Living Decorations, 12/2020
Managing a Compost Pile, 08/2020
Managing Water and Weeds in Your Garden, 06/2020
Monthly Pecan Information Available on Zoom, 08/2020
Now is the Time to Plan for Spring Flowering Bulbs, 09/2020
Oklahoma Grown Christmas Trees, 12/2020
Oklahoma Proven Selections for 2020, 02/2020
Patio is Center of Outdoor Entertainment, 09/2020
Pecan Graftwood Sources, 02/2020
Persimmon Tree, 12/2020
Pest Control in the Landscape and Garden, 04/2020
Plant Spring-Flowering Bulbs Now!, 10/2020
Planting Trees, 05/2020
Poinsettia Care, 12/2020
Poisonous Landscape Plants, 06/2020
Poisonous Plants for Pets, 07/2020
Protecting Young Trees, 11/2020
Pruning and Staking Tomatoes, 06/2020
Pruning Roses, 03/2020
Pruning Storm Damaged Trees, 03/2020
Redbud – Oklahoma’s State Tree, 04/2020
Re-flowering Your Poinsettias for Christmas, 10/2020
Rose Alternatives, 05/2020
Season Extenders, 10/2020
Second Crop, 09/2020
Selecting Deciduous Trees for the Landscape, 05/2020
Six Must Have Plants for the Shade Garden, 06/2020
Soil Testing, 08/2020
Soil Testing for Vegetable Crops, 10/2020
Start Planning Now for Spring Fruit Tree Planting, 10/2020
Starting Your Garden, 05/2020
Tips for Bringing Plants Indoors, 09/2020
Tomato Blossom Drop or Poor Fruit Set, 06/2020
Tomato Blossom-End Rot, 07/2020
Tomato Varieties – How To Choose?, 04/2020
Tool Cleanup and Sharpening, 12/2020
Transplanting Tomatoes, 05/2020
Twig Girdlers, 09/2020
Using Bedding Plants in the Landscape!, 04/2020
Water Garden Plants Belong in the Water Garden – ONLY!, 07/2020
Water Saving Tips, 05/2020
Water Temperature Management for Hydroponic Production in the Summer, 07/2020
Watering the Yard and Garden Efficiently, 07/2020

Winter Landscape, 12/2020
Zinc in Pecan Trees, 05/2020