

## **October 2023**

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources  
Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture  
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### **GARDEN TIPS FOR OCTOBER!**

*David Hillock, Senior Extension Specialist*

#### 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 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.

## **Gourds**

*Casey Hentges, Associate Extension Specialist*

*Bailey Singleton, Extension Assistant*

Squash and gourds are always on our minds as fall rounds the corner, but what is the difference between a squash and a gourd. Typically, squash is something that is grown and harvested to eat, whereas a gourd is primarily used for decorative purposes.

The birdhouse gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*) is an aggressive climber and can be heavy on a trellis so it is important to grow it on something sturdy. While it is best if it has something to climb on, it will grow along the ground also. Trellising will allow the fruit to hang in the air rather than resting on the ground which can sometimes cause the fruit to rot. The birdhouse gourd has a white flower that blooms in the evening. It is a hard-shelled gourd that is native to northern Africa but because it is easy to grow and because of the function of the fruit it produces, the seeds are grown all over the world. They are often made into birdhouses, but they are also used for food and water containers, floatation devices, musical instruments, and garments.

As the gourds mature, they start to turn yellow. Nothing needs to be done with these until after the first frost kills the vine. The gourds are then harvested and dried for future use.

The luffa gourd (*Luffa acutangular* or *Luffa aegyptiaca*) is grown for its interior unlike the birdhouse gourd that is grown for its exterior. It is true that some sponges come from the ocean, but the luffa sponge, also known as vegetable sponge or sponge gourd, comes from a vining plant. It has the tendency to climb with its tendrils, easily reaching 30 feet in length. While some luffas can be eaten, typically the fruits are used for the fibrous matrix interior to make sponges for cleaning. This vine is a bit showier with sunshine yellow flowers that grab the attention of bees and other pollinators. While they look like cucumbers hanging on the trellis, these will be harvested after the first frost as well.

Provide both of these gourds with moist, well drained, rich garden soil and full sun, then step back and watch them take over.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfcLeQ\\_cd2M&t=162s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfcLeQ_cd2M&t=162s)

## **Celebrating Oklahoma Pecans!**

Becky Carroll, Senior Extension Specialist



With pecan harvest season approaching, several events are on the schedule for Oklahomans to celebrate the state's native treat. Find a location near you to visit! Some locations are looking for vendors too. I'll have an educational booth at the Oklahoma Pecan Festival in Ardmore.

Some interesting things at some of the events include – pecan harvest demonstrations, baking contests, BBQ contests, craft pecan beer, chain saw carvings, pony rides, kids activities, live music, and much more!

October 21 – Pecan Harvest Fest 2023, Buchanan Farms, Ardmore - <https://bfpecanfarm.com/events/>

October 22 – Tulsa Farmer's Market 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Harvest Festival, Knight Creek Farm, Sapulpa - <https://www.tulsafarmersmarket.org/events>

October 26-28 - Okmulgee Pecan Festival, Okmulgee - <https://www.okmulgeechamber.org/pecan-festival>

October 28-29 – 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Route 66 Pecan & Music Festival, Claremore - <https://www.rt66pecanfest.com/>

November 11 – Oklahoma Pecan Festival, Ardmore - <https://www.facebook.com/events/162186693546096>

November 18-19 - Luther Pecan Festival, Luther - <https://www.lutherregister.news/pecan-festival-2023/>

## Twig Girdlers

*David Hillock*

This time of year, we can find many small branches from the tips of trees lying on the ground. These small branches accumulating on the ground are a good indicator of an insect called a twig girdler.

The twig girdler is a small beetle that has one generation in Oklahoma per growing season. Some indicators that these branches lying on the ground are due to twig girdlers include: the presence of clean-cut twigs, and/or dangling (flagged) branch tips within a tree. The Twig girdler female chews a V-shaped groove around a small twig, girdling it. She then will lay an egg underneath the bark on the girdled limb. This portion of the limb dies quickly and will fall to the ground or sometimes hang in the tree with the larva inside. The small larva will overwinter in the fallen



twig. During the following spring, the larva resumes feeding, consuming most of the wood. As the larva grows it bores further down into the twig and fills the tunnel with wood shavings and waste. Pupation occurs in a cavity within the twig. Adults emerge in late summer and early fall.

Twig girdlers are a pest that can be managed easily with good sanitation practices. Homeowners should collect and destroy infested twigs and branches they find on the ground, beginning in the fall or early spring. This will eliminate the overwintering larvae. Infested limbs should also be pruned out and burned, if feasible. Sanitation is a cheap environmentally friendly way to manage these pests, especially for small plantings.

## **Trunk Protective Materials**

*David Hillock*

Young, thin-barked trees such as ash, birch, linden, maples, and others often sunscald unless protected. The twigs that shade the trunk should be left but cut back a few inches so they become denser. A twiggy trunk is preferable to tree wraps, but not all trees have enough twigs, nor is it always practical or aesthetically pleasing to leave lower limbs.

Protective wraps are available and may provide protection by modifying temperatures for thin-barked trees. Plastic wraps may provide better protection than paper wraps against lawn mower, weed-eater, and rodent damage. If misused, however, damage may occur in the form of trunk girdling or constriction, insects, diseases, and excessive bark moisture.

Protective wraps may not be necessary at planting time. Use based on the type of protection needed. Normal application of tree trunk wraps is October to March for the first two growing seasons. Wraps should be removed each spring prior to spring growth. During spring growth, the trunk expands and increases in size. Wraps too tightly wrapped or left on during this time may result in constriction to the trunk. Tree wraps should be applied loosely from base up to the first branch by overlapping for a shingle effect. Plastic wraps should fit loosely and include holes or slits for good air movement. Periodically inspect the wraps for trunk damage and insects.



Advantages of tree wraps for young plants:

- Deter animals from browsing on bark.
- Reflects sun that either scalds the trunks or makes them susceptible to southwest injury during the winter months (bark is warmed followed by a sudden plunge in temperature which kills that portion of the bark).

## **Re-flowering Your Poinsettias for Christmas**

*David Hillock*

If you have managed to keep your poinsettia plant from last Christmas 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/early October. 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 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 lightproof 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.

## **Alternatives for Turf in Shady Areas**

*David Hillock*

Keeping turfgrass alive in shade in Oklahoma is quite challenging to say the least. If you have the right conditions and have been fairly successful with shade tolerant turfgrass, this is the time of year to overseed to thicken up the lawn after being damaged by the hot, humid summer. If you have made several attempts to establish turf in a shaded area and it hasn’t been successful, then your conditions may not be suitable for grasses, and it is time to consider other alternatives.

Heavy shade created by dense canopies of trees in small residential areas creates an environment that is far from desirable for turfgrasses, even for the turf-type tall fescues, which are moderately shade tolerant. Under such circumstances, stresses such as poor light quality and quantity, competition for water and nutrients, poor air movement, and leaf litter usually result in failure to establish a lawn.

Where such conditions exist and all attempts of establishing turfgrass have failed, consider shade tolerant perennial flowers, groundcovers, or mulched beds. Granted you will not be able to romp and play on the perennials and groundcovers, but you won’t have to mow them once a week either.

Perennials and groundcovers tend to compete well with trees for water and nutrients once established.

English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)  
Carpet Bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*)  
Common Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*, *V. major*)

Other plants that may be considered, depending on available light and water.

For Deep Shade:

Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*)  
Black Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon planiscapus* ‘Arabicus’)  
Japanese Painted Fern (*Athyrium nipponicum* var. *pictum*)  
Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*)  
Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)  
Lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*)  
Allegheny Spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*)  
Japanese Pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*)  
Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)  
Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*)  
Wild Gingers (*Asarum* spp.)

For Light Shade:

Moneywort, Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*)  
Bishop’s Goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria* ‘Variegatum’)  
Dwarf Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*)  
Carpet Bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*)  
Spotted Deadnettle (*Lamium maculatum*)  
Liriope, Lily-turf (*Liriope muscari*, *L. spicata*)  
Hostas, Plantain Lily (*Hosta* spp.)  
Strawberry Geranium (*Saxifraga stolonifera*)  
Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*)  
Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*)  
Lenten Rose (*Helleborus* spp.)  
Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)  
Alleghany Spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*)  
Japanese Pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*)  
Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*)  
Wild Gingers (*Asarum* spp.)  
Epimediums (*Epimedium* spp.)  
Sedges (*Carex* spp.)

For additional suggestions of alternatives for shade see fact sheet [HLA-6608 - Managing Turfgrass in the Shade in Oklahoma](#).

## **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](#).

## **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 combination formulas. 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 a few weeds 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!!