With Mother Nature sprinkling in some 70-degree days amongst the colder temperatures, gardeners all across Oklahoma are more than ready to get rolling on their gardens. With as much time and effort that gets put into their gardens and landscapes, gardeners want to make sure their efforts are rewarded.

First, learn what USDA Plant Hardiness Zone you’re in. Most of Oklahoma ranges from zone 6a to 8a. The zone can also impact planting dates. When purchasing plants or seeds, choose those that indicate they’ll grow well in your zone.

A note for beginning gardeners – bigger isn’t always better. Start small with just a few herbs in pots or a tomato plant or two. Make the garden small enough so it’s easy to establish and maintain. This will help ensure proper care for the plants.

For garden layout, a north-to-south orientation of rows will allow plants to take full advantage of available sunlight. Be aware of trees or structures that may obstruct the natural light.

Follow planting guidelines for depth and spacing. Gardeners don’t want to choke out the plants because they’re planted too close together. Also, group plants together that have similar light and irrigation requirements.

Speaking of water, use some type of mulch in the garden to help conserve moisture. There are many varieties of mulch that will add visual appeal to the garden space. Mulch not only helps conserve water, but also helps control weeds, cools the soil (which is great during a hot Oklahoma summer) and can reduce fruit rot.

While irrigation is important, be careful not to overwater. It’s not good for the plants to constantly be sitting in wet, soggy soil. Don’t work garden soil when it’s too wet because it will become compacted simply by walking on it.

Even if gardeners have put down a thick layer of mulch, some tenacious weeds will find their way to the surface. Don’t put off weeding chores for too long as they can quickly get out of hand.

When it comes to pesticides, be sure to read and follow all label directions for mixing and application. Make sure to use the right product for the task that needs to be accomplished.

When it comes to garden tools, it’s important to use the right tool for the job. If you have a small garden, you’ll do well with a spade, shovel or spading fork; a rake for finish work; and a hoe for weeding. If you have a larger garden, and your budget allows, a powered rototiller will come in handy. When purchasing tools, consider the garden size, the jobs to complete and the amount of
money available to purchase equipment. Good quality tools will give better results, stay sharp longer and, if cared for properly, can last a lifetime.

Nothing in life is a guaranteed success, but following these tips can help gardeners achieve a green thumb.