

Horticulture Tips

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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
Oklahoma State University

GARDEN TIPS FOR DECEMBER!

David Hillock

Lawn & Turf

- * Remove leaves from cool-season grasses or mow with a mulching mower. (F-6420)
- * Continue mowing cool-season lawns on a regular basis. (F-6420)
- * Continue to control broadleaf weeds in well-established warm- or cool-season lawns with a post-emergent broadleaf weed killer. (F-6421)

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. (F-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, magazine subscriptions, *Oklahoma Gardening* educational tapes or membership to OBGA.
- * 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 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.

Christmas Trees

David Hillock

Today there are several options when it comes to choosing a Christmas tree including cut trees, potted or balled trees and artificial trees. Cut, live trees are the most common type of Christmas tree. Three options are available to a person wanting a cut Christmas tree----a pre-cut tree purchased from a dealer, a choose-and-cut tree purchased from a local grower or a wild-grown native Christmas tree.

Cut Trees

Great care needs to be taken in selecting a pre-cut tree. Most pre-cut Christmas trees sold in Oklahoma are grown in the Lake States and the Pacific Northwest and may have been cut as early as August. However, some trees are locally grown and thus will be fresher and less prone to drying out too quickly. As soon as a Christmas tree is cut it begins to dry. A tree that has dried will not recover when placed in water and is a fire hazard. Dry trees also tend to lose needles.

Follow these steps to be sure that the tree you are buying is fresh and of high quality.

1. Gently pull on the needles. They should be tightly attached to the twig.
2. Shake the tree vigorously or bounce the butt on the ground. If green needles fall, look further. Dead, brown needles falling from the inner part of the tree are older needles and are less of a problem.
3. Check to see that the tree has a fresh, green color. Some trees are sprayed with a blue-green dye. This dye is harmless, but be sure it's not hiding a dry tree. Some trees like Scotch pine tend to be light green in color during colder weather but will darken up once moved indoors.
4. Buy early before all the desirable trees have been sold.
5. Fir and pine trees hold needles better than spruce trees.
6. Break a few needles. They should be flexible and will feel moist or possibly sticky. They should also be fragrant when crushed.
7. Be sure limbs are strong enough to support lights and ornaments. Limbs should also be well placed to give the tree a pleasing shape. Minor defects can often be turned toward a wall, however, and can lower the purchase price.
8. Ask the dealer if the tree was locally grown. Local trees are much more likely to be fresh because they are cut nearer Christmas and aren't shipped long distances.

Choose-and-cut trees are available from Christmas tree growers throughout Oklahoma. For the locations of local growers, contact your local Extension office. Trees available from Oklahoma growers include Virginia pine, Scotch pine, eastern white pine, Austrian pine, ponderosa pine, white pine, Norway spruce, and concolor fir.

Buy a choose-and-cut tree the way you would a pre-cut tree. Freshness and health are still the most important characteristics. The grower will usually have many trees marked for sale in various sizes. Some growers will cut the tree for you and others will expect you to cut your own.

Native trees can also be used as Christmas trees. If you cut your own native Christmas tree, be sure you get the landowner's permission. Trespassing is illegal, even to cut what may be an unwanted tree.

It may also be wise to check for insects on choose-and-cut and native trees. Aphids can be found on evergreens this time of year. Several years ago my family cut our own tree from a tree farm. A few days after we got it home and set up, little dark spots began to appear all over the presents and the floor. Turns out that the tree was loaded with aphids that became active when brought into the warmer temperatures. We had to occasionally vacuum them up until we got them all.

Potted or Balled Trees

Some people buy a potted or balled Christmas tree with roots intact in the hope of having a new landscape tree come spring. This is very difficult to do successfully, but your chances of success increase if the tree is treated right.

1. Buy a healthy tree from a reputable nursery or grower. Expect to pay a higher price than for a typical Christmas tree.
2. Keep the tree in a shaded area or a nonheated garage until it is brought inside.
3. Keep the soil in the ball or pot moist until well after it is transplanted after Christmas. A frozen ball need not be watered if the crown is shaded and protected.
4. Lift and carry the tree by the ball or pot, not the top.
5. Keep the tree in the house no longer than about one week, five days or less is even better.
6. Have the tree's planting hole dug before the soil freezes and keep the fill dirt thawed. The planting hole and backfill can be protected from freezing by covering with plastic and then a thick layer of straw.

Artificial Trees

Artificial trees must be used carefully. Electric lights should not be used on metal trees because of the danger of electric shock. Light these trees with off-the-tree spotlights. Plastic trees may be fire resistant but the fumes they give off when burned are toxic.

Cut Tree Care

To insure a safe and happy holiday, you need to know a few things about caring for Christmas trees.

Once you have chosen a fresh Christmas tree, do your best to keep it fresh. A tree can stay fresh and healthy for several weeks if it is well cared for.

1. When you get the tree home, cut about an inch off of the butt end to aid in water absorption. Get the cut end into a container of plain water quickly. There is no need to add aspirin, sugar, or flame retardant to the water.
2. If the tree is not set up right away, store it in a protected, shady, unheated area. Cut the end and place the tree in a bucket of water.
3. When the tree is brought into the house, saw a slice of the butt again to insure water absorption.
4. Use a sturdy stand with a large water reservoir so it won't dry out. A fresh tree can use one quart or more of water a day, so water daily. A tree is beginning to dry out if its water use slows or stops.
5. Keep the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces, TV's, radiators and air ducts. Never have open flames on or near a Christmas tree.

Decorating the Tree

Use only electric lights on your tree, never candles. Lights and cord should have the Underwriters Laboratories safety seal. Discard old damaged Christmas lights. New lights are relatively inexpensive, use less electricity, and stay cooler than old lights. Follow directions to determine how many strings to put on one circuit. Be sure to turn off the tree lights when no one will be in the room for any length of time.

Tree Disposal

Christmas trees can be useful even after they are taken down. Trees can be placed in the yard to add greenery and act as a bird haven until spring. Christmas trees can be used for firewood or chopped up and used as mulch. Many communities have programs to gather trees after Christmas to be chipped for mulch or other uses. Trees can also be used to create a fish attractor by weighting the base of the tree and sinking it in a pond.

Master Gardener Corner

David Hillock

State Master Gardener Conference Scheduled!

Master Gardeners, mark your calendars for **June 20 – 21, 2003!!** We will hold our summer annual Master Gardener Continued Training Conference in Tulsa at the Tulsa Community College – North Campus hosted by TCC and the Tulsa County Master Gardeners. Watch for details to arrive early next year.

HIS (Horticulture Industries Show)

Don't forget that HIS will be held in Springdale, AR this coming January on the 10 – 11. This is another opportunity available for returning Master Gardeners who wish to keep up their active membership by accumulating 20 continue training hours each year. Several commodity groups will be conducting educational sessions and you are welcome to attend any you wish. Of course we would love to see you in the Master Gardener/Public Horticulture session as well. Hope to see you there! Registration will be due soon, so contact your county coordinator for registration packets if you are interested in attending.

Sharpen That Blade Now!

David Hillock

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 insures that the first cut is a good “sharp” one!

Winter Irrigation

David Hillock

Don't forget to water your landscape plants during the winter months. It is not uncommon to have several weeks without precipitation during the winter, and though most plants are in a dormant state, they still use water, especially evergreens. If a cold front with freezing temperatures is forecasted, water the landscape at least a couple days in advance. Moist soil is better able to provide plant roots protection from sudden drops in temperatures than dry soils are.

Pay particular attention to plants in raised beds, plants in areas that are protected from precipitation such as under large overhangs, and broadleaf evergreen plants. During dry winters, broadleaf evergreens should be watered once a month.

2002 State Pecan Show

Becky Carroll

The 2002 State Pecan Show will be conducted with few changes from last year. There will not be any qualifying regional or district pecan shows. However, some county/area shows may be held at the discretion of the County Extension Educator. Growers are encouraged to participate in county shows if available. Winning entries from county shows will be sent to the state show. If no county/area show is available, growers may enter pecans directly by sending samples to Becky Carroll, 360 Ag Hall, OSU, Stillwater, OK 74078. Samples should arrive by January 21, 2003.

Samples should be entered in a sealed plastic or paper bag. Label the bag on the outside and place a label inside the bag. Information should include exhibitors name and address, county, and type of pecan entered. Be sure to follow the guidelines that are listed below before sending entries.

General Rules and Guidelines

- All entries must be grown in Oklahoma during the current season.
- Each entry shall consist of two pounds of nuts.
- Entries deemed unworthy by the judges will not compete for awards.
- Label each entry as to exhibitor's name, address and cultivar of nuts. If more than one native (seedling) pecan exhibit is made, identify the nuts from separate trees by numbers. Only one exhibit of each cultivar or native tree may be entered by one individual.
- Each entry will compete in one of the following 28 classes:

1. Apache	11. Mahan	21. Squirrels Delight
2. Barton	12. Maramec	22. Stuart
3. Burkett	13. Mohawk	23. Success
4. Cheyenne	14. Pawnee	24. Western
5. Choctaw	15. Peruque	25. Wichita
6. Comanche	16. San Saba (Improved)	26. Other Cultivars
7. Graking	17. Schley (eastern)	27. Large Native (seedling)
8. Gratex	18. Shawnee	28. Small Native (seedling)
9. Kanza	19. Shoshoni	
10. Kiowa	20. Sioux	

- Each grower is allowed to participate at one county show of his or her choice.
- Each grower is allowed to enter one entry in each show class with the exception of Class 26 (Other Cultivars).
- Each grower may enter one entry from each native (seedling) tree.
- Entries should be shipped or mailed to arrive at the show prior to the deadline.
- County pecan shows will not be affected by these rules and procedures.
- Only first and second place winners in each class of each county/area show will be eligible to compete in the State Pecan Show. Eligible entries will be placed in cold storage, and judged before the Oklahoma Pecan Growers Annual Meeting. At that time, the winning entries will be displayed with awards and recognitions. All entries will become the property of the OPGA.
- First and second place winners in each class at the State Pecan Show will receive ribbons.

- State Pecan Show Special Awards – Trophies will be awarded for the largest pecan entry, the entry having the highest kernel percentage, the champion native and the best entry of the show.
- If a qualifying show is not available, growers may submit entries in accordance with these guidelines directly to the State Show. Entries in the state show must be received by January 21, 2003 at the following address:

Department of Horticulture
Attn: Becky Carroll
360 Ag Hall
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078

A Star is Born in The Lawn

Steve Owens

An interesting fungi making an appearance in many lawns across Oklahoma this time of year are the Earth Stars. Their onion-shaped fruiting bodies can be seen right at or slightly above the soil surface. Earth Stars are also similar in appearance to their close relatives, the puff balls, but have a tougher outer skin, or peridium. When it rains, the outer two layers of the peridium split and uncurl, forming a “star” with 4 to 12 rays. After this unpeeling takes place the “stomach” of the earth star is exposed allowing the multitudes of tiny smoke-like spores to be released, either by wind blowing across the surface or by rain drops striking the mass, puffing the spores into the air. The splitting and uncurling of the outer layers has enough force to push away grass blades and fallen leaves to better expose the spore mass. Both earth stars and puff balls belong to a group of fungi called the Gasteromycetes or “stomach” fungi, referring to their stomach-like sacs filled with spores.

We are more likely to see earth stars in the fall or spring when we are having our rainy weather. The moisture allows for the growth of the fruiting bodies that we see above ground. However, the bulk of the fungus is present throughout the year underground as a large mass of thread-like tissue called hyphae, which makes up the body of the fungus, or the mycelium. The “Fairy Rings” of other fungi we sometimes see in lawns are a visible example of how the underground network of mycelium is connected.

These masses of mycelium of earth stars, Fairy Rings, and other fungi, are for the most part, not harmful to our lawns. They are actually helpful in nature as they are saprophytic, meaning that they feed on decaying organic matter. For instance, they help in the decomposition of roots left behind from fallen trees or any other organic material that may be in the soil. The mycelium of some soil fungi form symbiotic relationships with plant roots and actually aid the plant in the uptake of moisture and nutrients from the soil.

The spores of earth stars are very small in size and extremely dry. This allows for their ease of being whisked away by the gentlest of breezes. Interestingly, some tribes of Native Americans would pack large wounds with these spores to slow bleeding and cause clotting.

Be sure to keep an eye out for these unique stellar fungi in your lawn after a fall or spring time rainy spell causes their fruiting bodies to start growing.

Upcoming Turfgrass Education Events in the 1st Quarter of 2003

Dennis Martin

Oklahoma Certified Pesticide Applicator Training and Testing, January 8-9, 2003 at the Tulsa County Extension Office, 4116 E. 15th Street, Tulsa, OK. Service Technician and/or Core Exam Training and Testing will be held on January 8, with Ornamental & Turf Outdoor Pest Control Training and Testing (Category 3a) on January 9. Call Brian Jervis at 918-746-3707 for more details.

3rd Annual OK/AR Turf Short Course, January 14-15, 2003 at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, AR. Links to a flyer will be available at www.turf.okstate.edu as soon as a flyer is ready. Or, subscribe to Oklahoma Turfgrass Notes and receive the notice of the short course by email by sending a note to hortedm1@okstate.edu.

Annual OK Horticulture Industries Council Conference & Trade Show, January 17-18, 2003 at the Tulsa Convention Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Several of the Seminars have been submitted for Pesticide Applicator Continuing Education Units for Oklahoma Certified Applicators in Category 3. The schedule for the conference is at <http://www.oknurserymen.org/Show%20Schedule.htm> or call the OK Nursery & Landscape Association at 405-942-5276.

Sports Turf Management Conferences on February 18 - Tulsa and February 19 - Oklahoma City in 2003. See the OSU at Oklahoma City Calendar of Events at: <http://www.osuokc.edu/agriculture/calevents.htm> or call David Gerken at (405) 945-3358 for more information.

Upcoming Horticulture Events

Arkansas & Oklahoma Horticulture Industries Show
January 10-11, 2003
Holiday Inn, Springdale, Arkansas

Specialty Cut Flowers
February 27, 2003
Holiday Inn, Stillwater, Oklahoma
For more information, contact Mike Schnelle at mas@state.edu.

2003 Oklahoma Grape Management Class
Oklahoma Fruit Research Station, Perkins, Oklahoma

2003 Pecan Management Class
Oklahoma Pecan Research Station, Perkins, Oklahoma

For more information about upcoming events, please contact Stephanie Larimer at 405-744-5404 or steph@okstate.edu.

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