

# Horticulture Tips

## July 2003

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

### **GARDEN TIPS FOR JULY!**

*David Hillock*

- Make fall vegetable garden plantings in late July. Planting recommendations are given in F-6009.
- Water plants deeply and early in the morning. Most plants need approximately 1 to 2 1/2 inches of water per week.
- Mowing heights for cool-season turfgrasses should be at 3 inches during hot, dry summer months. Gradually raise mowing height of bermudagrass lawns from 1 1/2 to 2 inches.
- Sharpen or replace mower blades as needed. Shredded leaf blades are an invitation to disease and allow more stress on the grass.
- Continue insect combat and control in the orchard, garden and landscape. (F-7306, F-7313)
- Check pesticide labels for "stop" spraying recommendations prior to harvest.
- Control bermudagrass around trees and shrubs with Poast, Fusilade or Glyphosate herbicides. Follow directions closely to avoid harming plants.
- Harvest fruit from the orchard early in the morning and refrigerate as soon as possible.
- Providing birdbaths, shelter and food will help turn your landscape into a backyard wildlife habitat.
- Insect identification is important so you don't get rid of the "Good Guys." (F-7307)
- Divide and replant crowded Hybrid Iris (Bearded Iris) after flowering until August.
- Expect some leaf fall, a normal reaction to drought. Water young plantings well.
- Vegetative establishment of warm-season grasses should be completed by the end of July to ensure the least risk of winter kill. (F-6419)
- Brown patch disease of cool-season grasses can be a problem. (F-6420)
- Meet water requirements of turfgrasses. (F-6420)
- Fertilization of warm-season grasses can continue if water is present for growth. (F-6420)
- The hotter and drier it gets, the larger the spider mite populations!
- Have you visited the *Oklahoma Gardening Studio Gardens* in Stillwater for a group tour?

## **Watering the Yard and Garden Efficiently**

*David Hillock*

During the summer, watering the landscape and garden can be the primary focus of our activities. Irrigation systems, whether a simple hose-end sprinkler or an elaborate in-ground system, help us accomplish this great task with a little more ease. Obviously some systems require a little more attention and effort than others. However, all should be closely monitored and managed so that they are working efficiently and providing adequate coverage for the plant's needs.

A minimum of one inch of water per week is usually required to maintain optimum growth of most plants. However, that will vary depending on the types of plants grown, the soil type and weather conditions. During the hottest and driest part of the summer, two or more inches per week may be necessary. But, how much water does your sprinkler(s) put out?

One way to find out how much water your system is putting out is to catch the water. Use straight-sided canisters such as tuna cans and place them randomly under the sprinkler pattern. About 6 cans work well. Turn the sprinkler(s) on and let them run for about 15 minutes. Turn off the water and measure the depth of water caught in each can using a simple ruler. Average all the measurements together, this will tell you how much the system is putting out and how long to run the sprinkler system. For example, you wish to place one inch of water when you irrigate. The average amount of water that was measured when running the system for 15 minutes was .25 inches. So, you will need to run your system for one hour in order to irrigate one inch. Remember that some soils will not absorb water that fast. Sprinklers should be turned off when water begins to puddle or run off the surface. Allow the water to percolate into the soil for several hours before turning the sprinklers back on.

Some plants require constantly moist soils to maintain optimum growth and performance while others are quite drought tolerant and may even prefer dry soils. One way to make sure all the plants in the landscape are getting what they need is to group plants together based on their watering needs. Be careful not to plant together two plants that have completely different water needs or one of them will eventually suffer and die. Place plants that require little water in areas that are difficult to reach or water. The amount of water needed in the landscape can be reduced by reducing the size of areas planted with plants that need a lot of water to survive. This also reduces the water bill! Locate high-water requiring plants near the home - around the entrance or outdoor living areas such as a patio or deck.

Drip and soaker hose systems are more efficient than regular sprinkler systems. Drip and soaker hoses keep the water low to the ground and usually right where you want the water to go. Sprinkler systems throw the water into the air where much of it can be lost due to evaporation and wind. Water early in the morning when temperatures are not as high and wind is usually low to reduce loss by evaporation or strong winds.

## **A Brief History of the Watermelon**

*William McGlynn*

The cool, sweet crunch of fresh watermelon is the perfect antidote to the thirsty heat of a summer day. Indeed, it's hard to imagine a proper summer holiday celebration without a slice of watermelon to finish off the meal. Because of this customary connection, I've always thought of watermelon as one of the quintessential American foods, right up there with hot dogs and apple pie. How could we celebrate the Fourth of July without it? But it turns out that watermelon has a history that stretches back long before 1776.

As many folks know, watermelon belongs to the Curcubitaceae family and is related to cucumbers, pumpkins and squash. The vine is thought to have come originally from the deserts of southern Africa, where it was domesticated in prehistoric times and spread north as far as the southern coast of the Mediterranean. Egyptian wall decorations dating from 4-5,000 years ago depict the cultivation and harvest of watermelon, making it one of the very first recorded horticultural crops. Gradually, the crop spread throughout much of Eurasia. The Moors are credited with introducing the watermelon to medieval Europe via Spain and records indicate that watermelons had reached China by the 10th Century.

It is clear that watermelons arrived in the Americas after Columbus. It is less clear exactly when and how this occurred. Some historians credit early Spanish and Portuguese explorers with introducing watermelon to the new world; others maintain that watermelons arrived with the influx of African slaves brought to work the fields. In any case, the cultivation of watermelon was soon established among both the settlers and the indigenous Native American populations. Indeed, the very first cookbook published in the United States in 1796 contained a recipe for watermelon rind pickles. Watermelon had by then become a near universal crop found over much of the globe.

If anything, the popularity of watermelon in the U.S. has grown since those early days of the republic. Nowadays we have a large variety of melon types including seedless melons, yellow melons, and others to tickle our taste buds. We've also learned, and continue to learn, a great deal about the health-beneficial properties of watermelon such as the disease-preventing benefits of the red pigment lycopene. There's no doubt that we humans have altered watermelons a great deal as we've carried them with us around the world. Still, despite the long journey in both distance and time from the banks of the ancient Nile, it's intriguing to think that to bite into a fresh watermelon on a hot day is to enjoy a pleasure that hasn't much changed since the days of the Pharaohs.

## **Upcoming Horticulture Events**

### **Multi-State Ornamental Plant Materials Conference**

September 24-25, 2003

Holiday Inn, Stillwater

**Tree Care Conference**

October 14, 2003  
OBGA, Stillwater

**Greenhouse Growers' Fall Seminar**

October 21, 2003  
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater

**Horticulture Therapy Conference**

November 12, 2003  
Holiday Inn, Stillwater

**Oklahoma Nursery and Greenhouse Trade Show and Convention**

January 15-17, 2004  
Oklahoma City

For more information about upcoming events, please contact Stephanie Larimer at 405-744-5404 or [steph@okstate.edu](mailto:steph@okstate.edu).