

Horticulture Tips

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

GARDEN TIPS FOR NOVEMBER!

David Hillock

Lawn & Turf

- Fertilize cool season grasses like fescue with 1 pound nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft.
- Continue to mow fescue as needed at 2 inches and water during dry conditions.
- Control broadleaf winter weeds like dandelions (FS-6601).
- Keep falling leaves off fescue to avoid damage to the foliage.

Tree & Shrub

- Prune deciduous trees in early part of winter. Prune only for structural and safety purposes.
- Wrap young, thin-barked trees with a commercial protective material to prevent winter sunscald.
- Apply dormant oil for scale infested trees and shrubs before temperatures fall below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Follow label directions.
- Continue to plant balled and burlapped trees.
- Watch for arborvitae aphids, which tolerate cooler temperatures in evergreen shrubs.

Flowers

- Tulips can still be successfully planted through the middle of November.
- Leave foliage on asparagus, mums and other perennials to help insulate crowns from harsh winter conditions.
- Bulbs like hyacinth, narcissus and tulip can be potted in containers for indoor forcing.

Miscellaneous

- Leftover garden seeds can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator or freezer until next planting season. Discard seeds over 3 years old.
- Gather and shred leaves. Add to compost, use as mulch or till into garden plots.
- Clean and store garden and landscape tools. Coat with a light application of oil to prevent rusting. Drain fuel tanks, irrigation lines and hoses. Bring hoses indoors.

Fruits & Nuts

- Delay pruning fruit trees until next February or March before bud break.
- Harvest pecans and walnuts immediately to eliminate deterioration of the kernel.

Onion Bulbing and Bolting (Adapted from Hort Tips - July 1966) *Jim Shrefler*

Two important processes in onions are bolting (flowering) and bulb formation. The processes are controlled by different sets of environmental factors. Bolting is influenced by field temperature and growers can control this to some extent with planting practices. More control over the bulbing process is possible than over the bolting process. The control over bulbing is achieved by making careful variety selection and planting date choices.

Bulbing has three components—initiation, rate of development, and ultimate size—which are influenced by several environmental factors. The principal factors in decreasing order of importance are: photoperiod (or day length), temperature, plant size and nitrogen nutrition.

Each onion variety has a critical day length for inducement of bulbing regardless of temperature or plant size. Requirements vary from 12-16 hours day length. Growing onions at less than their critical day length, (e.g. a northern long day onion variety in southern latitudes) will result in indefinite formation of new leaves and no bulb initiation. This principle is put to use when producing green bunching onions. Conversely, when short day varieties are grown under long days, bulbing occurs early in the leaf formation stages. Very small bulbs are formed because insufficient foliage and roots are developed to manufacture food to support large bulbs. Growing short day varieties during long days to get small bulbs is applicable to pickling, boiler, and cocktail onion production, but must be avoided if large onions are needed.

Once critical day length is reached for a variety, bulbing is initiated, but its growth rate depends on temperature. Bulbs develop more quickly as temperatures increase, and low temperatures can delay visible bulbing, and ultimately maturity, by 3-4 weeks. Bulb initiation is a day length response, rate of development is temperature dependent, and ultimate bulb size is heavily influenced by the plant size at bulbing and the variety. The larger the plant size when bulbing is initiated, the greater the potential for large bulbs. Thus, planting date and variety selection are very important management decisions.

Recent experience has shown that short and intermediate day length onion varieties can perform well in southeast Oklahoma in terms of bulb size that can be attained. Short day onion varieties, such as yellow granex and 1015-Y should be planted by late February to assure greatest bulb size. Intermediate varieties such as Candy can be planted during March, and even into early April, to produce bulbs of appreciable size. Note that some bulb size will be sacrificed when using the latest planting dates.

At the critical day length or photoperiod, time of bulbing can also be influenced by the supply of nitrogen: a deficiency hastens bulbing, an excess delays it. Since ultimate bulb size and maturity date are both determined by time of bulbing, nitrogen deficiencies and excesses should be avoided.

Bolting, the initiation of flowering and the formation of a seed stalk, is an irreversible process that is highly undesirable in bulb production. Onions that begin to develop a seed stalk are

generally not marketable. The principal factors that influence bolting are, in order of importance: temperature, variety and size of plant. Day length is not a factor. Bolting requires low growing temperatures. Most rapid bolting is induced at 40-45°F, but no critical temperature or length of time at a certain temperature has been established. Varieties differ widely in their susceptibility to bolting and thus in the temperature at which they bolt. Most bolting in winter and spring planted crops is associated with a long, cool spring or shorter periods of cold spring temperatures. Fall seeded crops are susceptible to bolting during the following spring if warm fall or winter temperatures result in excessive growth. When these conditions are followed by low winter temperatures and slowed growth, the result will be to trigger the plant to bolt when growth resumes in the spring. An onion transplant must be a certain minimum size before low temperatures can induce bolting. As a general rule, onion transplants less than ¼ inch in diameter are not susceptible to bolting. Larger onion transplants increase in susceptibility to bolting in direct proportion to their size.

In practice, it is possible that purchased plants may have been exposed to temperatures that induce bolting while the plants were still in the transplant nursery. There is no easy way to determine this when purchasing plants. However, if this is the case, there is nothing the grower can do to overcome the fact that the plants fate will be to produce a flower stalk. To reduce the chances of planting transplants that will bolt there are several approaches one can take. When purchasing bare-rooted transplants, it is best to avoid bundles of plants that have many large plants. There is increased chance that these plants may have been subjected to conditions conducive to bolting while still in the transplant nursery. A second option is to use intermediate varieties and later planting. With early planting of short day varieties, late cool weather that occurs following transplanting can induce bolting. By delaying planting until warmer weather has arrived, there is less chance for onions to be exposed to conditions that will induce bolting.

Winter Indoor Plant Care

David Hillock

During the short days of winter, many indoor houseplants that receive little or no artificial light enter a “resting stage.” If plants go into a rest period, give them little or no fertilizer. Avoid placing plants in hot spots or near cold drafty areas. Very few plants like the top of a TV set and almost none will survive the blast of a heater vent. Most will not like to be near a door where cold drafts alternate as people walk in and out. Watering needs may also change during the winter depending on how warm you keep your home during the winter. Be careful not to overwater. Potting medium in plants like poinsettias should be kept moist to the touch while others should be allowed to dry slightly before watering.

When Should I Cut My Perennials Back?

David Hillock

A common question this time of year is “When do I cut my perennials back?” Most plants are going dormant for the winter and may seem a bit ugly to some. However, most perennials would

benefit from keeping their dormant foliage during the winter. The canopy of dead foliage actually provides protection to the crown of the plant against the harsh winter months (a natural mulch) and at the same time catches and distributes valuable precipitation to the plant roots.

An added benefit is winter beauty. You may have to stretch your imagination a little, but the natural tones of brown, tan, gray, white, etc., adds a subtle beauty and purpose to the garden. Picture if you will the leaves, flowers and stems of ornamental grasses swaying back and forth in a breeze, the black seedheads of black-eyed Susan and the faded blossoms of Autumn Joy sedum. Some perennials may also be useful in attracting winter wildlife to the garden.

There are, however, a couple reasons you may want to cut back the foliage of your perennials. If they have been riddled with pests, it is a good idea to get rid of the affected foliage so that the pest does not overwinter. Another reason may be to reduce rodent populations, which may take up residency in such a nice environment.

Oklahoma Cucurbit Production and Marketing Educational Meeting

Jim Shrefler

Cucurbit crops are important to many Oklahoma farmers and gardeners and offer a variety of production and marketing opportunities to both small and large scale vegetable growers. Crops in the cucurbit family include favorites such as pumpkin, squash, gourds, watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumber and more. These crops will be the focus of the 2004 Oklahoma Cucurbit Production and Marketing Educational Meeting which has been set for December 9 at Chickasha.

The 2004 Oklahoma Cucurbit meeting is being planned to address a variety of issues that should benefit commercial growers, home gardeners and Extension Educators alike. Among this year's guest speakers are Dr. Charles Marr, Vegetable Specialist, Kansas State University, who will offer presentations on experience in Kansas with pumpkin production and pest management. Chris Kirby, Urban Harvest Director, Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma will discuss new opportunities for produce marketing in Oklahoma. Mark Arney, Director, National Watermelon Promotion Board, will provide an update of watermelon promotion and latest information on benefits of this Oklahoma tradition. Additional topics will include cucurbit pest and disease management, production of specialty melons, health benefits of cucurbits and new developments in Oklahoma Mesonet weather resources for vegetable producers.

The meeting will be held December 9 at the fairgrounds in Chickasha. It will begin at 9 a.m. and end at 4 p.m. and will include a noon meal. To receive a brochure with additional meeting details call 580-889-7343. A brochure can also be requested by sending an email request to jshrefler-okstate@lane-ag.org. Meeting information will soon be posted at www.lane-ag.org.

Upcoming Horticulture Events

24th Annual Arkansas/Oklahoma Horticulture Industries Show

"Safe and Secure Food Begins on the Farm"

January 14-15, 2005

Fort Smith, Arkansas – Holiday Inn Civic Center

For more information contact Donna Dollins at donna.dollins@okstate.edu or 405-744-6460.

Oklahoma Gardening Summer Gardenfest

June 11, 2005

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