

# Horticulture Tips

## September 2006

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

### **GARDEN TIPS FOR SEPTEMBER!**

*David Hillock*

#### Landscape

- Watch for fall specials at garden centers and nurseries since fall is a great time for planting many ornamentals.
- Choose spring flowering bulbs as soon as available.
- Plant cool-season annuals like pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, snapdragons and dusty miller when temperatures begin to cool.
- You have all of September to plant cool-season vegetables like spinach, leaf lettuce, mustard and radishes, and until the middle of September to plant rutabagas, Swiss chard, garlic and turnips.
- Watch for and control any late infestations of tree webworms.
- Twig girdler insects should be controlled if large numbers of small branches of elms, pecans, or persimmons are uniformly girdled from the tree and fall to the ground.
- Begin to reduce the amount of light on outside tropical houseplants by placing them under shade trees before bringing them indoors for the winter.

#### Lawn

- Last nitrogen fertilizer application of the year on warm-season grasses should be applied no later than September 15. (F-6420)
- Winter broadleaf weeds like dandelion will begin to emerge in late September, which is also the best time to control them with a 2, 4-D type herbicide.
- If pre-emergent control of winter-annual weeds (henbit, chickweed, annual bluegrass, etc.) is desired in lawns, the application should be completed by the 2nd week of September. (F-6421) *Note: Do not treat areas that will be seeded in the fall.*
- Continue bermudagrass spray program with glyphosate products for areas being converted over to tall fescue this fall. (F-6421)
- Plan to seed bluegrass, fescue, or ryegrass as needed in shady areas in mid- to late-September. Fall is the best time to establish cool-season lawns. (F-6419)
- White grub damage can become visible this month. Apply appropriate soil insecticide if white grubs are a problem (F-7306). Water product into soil.

## **African Violets**

*David Hillock*

Growing African violets can be fun and rewarding. Below are some tips to growing healthy, floriferous plants.

**Light:** Indirect, but bright. Poor flowering of new varieties is most often a result of low light, natural or direct. If using supplemental light, use about 40W florescent, cool white and warm white in combination.

**Media:** Most commercially available potting soils work well. Be careful of drying: media shrinks from pot sides if allowed to get too dry. If water pours through without wetting the roots, water from beneath the pot.

**The Pot:** Plastic or clay.

**Water:** Room temperature; water from the bottom for best wetting action. Allow to drain; discarding drainage.

**High-humidity:** Set plants on gravel in water and especially when weather is hot and dry. Avoid hot/cold spots or drafts. Interior humidity can be very low during use of central air systems.

**Fertilize** with special African violet fertilizer or a general houseplant food. Uniform conditions are most important.

## **Overwintering Annuals**

*David Hillock*

Enjoy your colorful annuals indoors – bring them into your home this winter. Experts at the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN) recommend getting the annuals inside before they're hit by frosts that can kill them. In the protective environment of your living room, an annual that bloomed over and over throughout the summer will continue to do so in the house.

To grow annuals indoors, start them from plant cuttings or cut back potted plants and bring them inside. Here are more tips from the AAN:

- Use plant cuttings to start such annuals as impatiens, coleus, and geraniums. Within one to two weeks, they'll develop roots in vermiculite, sharp sand or perlite.
- Choose cuttings two to six inches long. Strip bottom leaves where the stem will be inserted into the rooting medium. Facilitate rooting by dipping the premoistened stem one inch into a rooting powder.
- Pinch off flower buds so they won't draw on the cutting's energy during the time it takes to develop roots. Maintain moisture and humidity by putting a clear plastic bag over the pot. Make sure leaves do not make contact with the plastic, as this will cause them to rot.

- Keep the rooting medium moist, not soggy. Each day check on the cuttings and immediately remove any rotting leaves from inside the bag. As the cuttings develop roots, keep it in an area of the room that is bright but not in direct sunlight.
- After one or two weeks, new roots will develop. Plant in four- to six-inch containers and protect from direct sun for up to three days. Then put potted plants in the brightest section of the room.
- Once the potted plant is established, pinch off the stem tip – this encourages growth of lateral branches that fill out the plant and cause it to flower more prolifically.
- To treat container-grown plants, trim them back to help them grow indoors. Reduce height by four to six inches. Petunias, geraniums, impatiens, lantana, and coleus are some plants that respond well to trimming and do well indoors.
- Before bringing in annuals, check for insect and disease problems. Check with your local garden center or nursery for the best suggestions for treatment.
- Once it's taken care of, put the plant in a bright area of a room. Windows facing south or west are good locations. Give the plant a good supply of plant food and soon you'll see new leaves develop and flowers begin to form.
- Because light is critical to encouraging a plant to bloom indoors, sun-loving annuals may not respond well to environments that have little natural winter light. Marigolds, zinnias, and other kinds of flowering plants need a good supply of sun, while less intense light suits coleus, impatiens, and some fibrous begonias.

## **Fall is a Great Time for Planting**

*David Hillock*

This summer has been brutally hot and dry and hopefully you and your plants have survived. But if some have succumbed to the heat and drought or you have found an ounce of regained hope and strength to get back out in the garden, now is a great time to think of replacing them.

Late summer and early fall months usually provide more optimum conditions for plant growth. The air temperatures begin to cool off and usually there are better chances for fall rains. This, coupled with the warm soil temperatures, makes for good root development of many landscape plants. As the air temperatures begin to fall and the days get shorter, root growth becomes a priority for plants rather than shoot growth. Roots will continue to grow in the soil as long as soil temperatures are still above 40 degrees F, so they continue to grow well into the late fall/early winter months and then resume again in early spring. This gives plants planted in the fall a head start on next year's growing season compared to those planted the following spring.

Unfortunately there are usually slim pickings this time of year because most garden centers and nurseries are trying to reduce their inventory for the winter. However, though the pickings are often much slimmer than in the spring, you can often find good end-of-the-year deals at the garden centers. It is also a good time to choose shade trees for fall color. The garden centers and nurseries also carry cool-season plants like pansies, garden mums, and flowering kale and cabbage which may provide some color even during the duller winter months.

## Flying Squirrels and Pecan Trees

Eric T. Stafne

I received a call recently from Mike Steele in Love County with a curious question. He said that a pecan grower had noticed that bark was falling from the upper limbs of his pecan trees and couldn't figure out the cause of the problem. And then, Mike asked the fateful question, "Is it some sort of critter doing this?" Well, the answer to that insightful question is yes, indeed, it is a critter.

Dr. Mike Smith did a fine job of covering what a flying squirrel is and what kind of damage they can inflict on trees in the latest Oklahoma Pecan Growers' Newsletter. However, I will add some information to his and summarize what he covered already.

Flying squirrels are the oldest living line of modern squirrels. They likely came to North America across the Bering Land Bridge from Asia about 25 million years ago. The early squirrels migrated as far south as Central America and some populations still exist in Central America and Mexico. There are two separate groups of flying squirrels: the Northern flying squirrel and the Southern flying squirrel. Even though they both originated in Asia, they were from different progenitors. Flying squirrels have the Latin name *Glaucomys volans* and there are 10 subspecies of the Southern flying squirrel in the USA, Mexico, Central America, and Canada, of which 4 are in the USA. These 4 subspecies are: *G. volans* ssp. *volans*, *G. volans* ssp. *saturatus*, *G. volans* ssp. *texensis*, and *G. volans* ssp. *querceti*. The subspecies *volans* and *saturatus* are both found in Oklahoma in the northeast part of the state and the southern part, respectively. The subspecies *texensis* is only found in eastern Texas and *querceti* is only found in Florida.

Flying squirrels are rodents and have tactile whiskers called vibrissae that help them navigate in the dark. They have 22 teeth that are used for eating, grooming, and to strip bark from trees for nesting material. In actuality, flying squirrels do not fly, but rather glide using a membranous fold of skin called a patagium. In the act of gliding the tail of the squirrel does not act as a rudder to control direction, but rather as a balance for stabilization while in midair. And most curiously, flying squirrels have "break-away" tails in case of close encounters with predators such as owls.

Southern flying squirrels create shelters to raise their young or as a daytime refuge. They store food within their nests. The nests are commonly made of bark – of which pecan tree bark is very useful. These nests are usually made in already existing tree cavities mainly in dead, hollow, or live trees where a broken limb or fungal decay has created an empty compartment. Flying squirrels are social creatures and do not hibernate so they are active year-round. They sometimes have aggregate nests where up to 50 squirrels live together, but usually the number is between 10 and 20.

The diet of a Southern flying squirrel includes pecans as well as acorns and other nuts, insects, spiders, slugs, snails, tree buds, flowers, berries, fungi, eggs, bark cambium, and tree sap. Of course, those of most interest to a pecan grower are the pecan nuts, bud, flowers, bark cambium, and tree sap. They can be damaging to trees and cause limbs to die as well as decrease yields.

The squirrels may hoard large quantities of nuts in tree cavities. They open nuts with their incisors and the opening is very indicative by having smooth edges and being oval in shape. They follow daylength patterns to determine when to start gathering nuts. Studies have shown that one flying squirrel could store as many as 15,000 nuts in one season.

On another note, flying squirrels may carry a disease called Typhus, so avoid handling them in the wild. They also reportedly make good pets, but I'm sure I couldn't convince pecan growers of that!

Links for more information, as well as photos of the critters, can be found here:

<http://www.hortla.okstate.edu/pecan/opga/images/2006quarterly07.pdf>

<http://www.flyingsquirrels.com/index.html>

## **Master Gardener Corner**

*David Hillock*

*2007 State Master Gardener Continued Training Conference* - Plans are already taking place for the 2007 State Master Gardener Continued Training Conference to be held in Claremore on Friday, June 8, 2007. The Rogers County Master Gardeners will host the conference and are already enthusiastically making plans. Stay tuned for more details! Be sure to mark your calendars now and we hope to see you all in June 2007!

## **Upcoming Horticulture Events**

### **Nursery and Greenhouse Trade Show/Convention**

September 28-29, 2006

Payne County Fairgrounds, Stillwater, OK

### **Plant Materials Conference**

October 11, 2006

Holiday Inn, Stillwater, OK

### **Poinsettia Open House**

November 1, 2006

OSU – Stillwater Research Greenhouse

### **Tree Care Workshop**

November 14, 2006 (Date changed from November 7 to November 14)

OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater, OK

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