

# Horticulture Tips

## March 2008

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

### **GARDEN TIPS FOR MARCH!**

*David Hillock*

#### Lawn and Turf

- Remove excessive thatch from warm-season lawns. Dethatching, if necessary, should precede crabgrass control treatment. ([HLA-6604](#))
- Broadleaf weeds can easily be controlled in cool-season lawns at this time with post-emergent broadleaf herbicides. ([HLA-6421](#))
- Preemergent crabgrass control chemicals can still be applied to cool- and warm-season turfgrasses ([HLA-6421](#)). Heed label cautions when using any weed killers near or in the root zone of desirable plantings.
- March is the second best time of the year to seed cool-season turfgrass; however, fall is the best time to plant. ([HLA-6419](#))
- Cool-season lawns such as bluegrass, fescue and ryegrass may be fertilized now with the first application of the season. Usually, four applications of fertilizer are required per year, in March, May, October and November. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Begin mowing cool-season grasses at 1 ½ to 3 ½ inches high. ([HLA-6420](#))

#### Flowers & Vegetables

- Cultivate annual flower and vegetable planting beds to destroy winter weeds.
- Apply mulch to control weeds in beds. Landscape fabric barrier can reduce the amount of mulch but can dry out and prevent water penetration. Thus, organic litter makes the best mulch.
- Prune roses just before growth starts and begin a regular disease spray program as the foliage appears on susceptible varieties. ([HLA-6403](#) & [EPP-7607](#))
- Avoid excessive walking and working in the garden when foliage and soils are wet.
- Start warm-season vegetable transplants indoors.
- Divide and replant overcrowded, summer and fall blooming perennials. Mow or cut back old liriopse and other ornamental grasses before new growth begins.
- Your cool-season vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, carrot, lettuce, onion, peas, spinach, turnips etc. should be planted by the middle of March.
- Watch for cutworms that girdle newly planted vegetables during the first few weeks of establishment. Cabbage looper and cabbageworm insects should be monitored and controlled in the garden. ([EPP-7313](#))

#### Trees & Shrubs

- Prune spring flowering plants, if needed, immediately following their bloom period.
- Plant evergreen shrubs, balled and burlapped, and bare root trees and shrubs.

- Anthracnose control on sycamore, maple and oak should begin at bud swell. ([EPP-7634](#))
- Diplodia Pine Tip blight control on pines begins at bud swell. ([EPP-7618](#))
- Chemical and physical control of galls (swellings) on stems of trees should begin now. ([EPP-7168](#) & [EPP-7306](#))
- Dormant oil can still be applied to control mites, galls, overwintering aphids, etc. ([EPP-7306](#))
- The first generation of Nantucket Pine Tip Moth appears at this time. Begin pesticide applications in late March. ([EPP-7306](#))
- Control Eastern tent caterpillars as soon as the critters appear.

#### Fruits

- Continue to plant strawberries, asparagus and other small fruit crops this month.
- Start your routine fruit tree spray schedule prior to bud break. ([EPP-7319](#))
- Remove winter mulch from strawberries in early March ([HLA-6214](#))

## **DON'T BAG IT!**

*David Hillock*

The growing season will soon be upon us and many are anxious to see the world turn green again. This will eventually lead to "yard waste." While not a great concern everywhere, it is of concern for many landfill companies in large and small urban areas across the country, even in Oklahoma!

The "Don't Bag It" program consists of a series of educational components including Lawn Care Plan, Leaf Composting and Mulching with Wood Chips. Each component encourages the recycling of landscape waste to help reduce this "needless waste" going to the landfills and at the same time makes for a healthier landscape.

In the Lawn Care Plan grass clippings are returned to the lawn to rapidly decompose resulting in a healthier lawn and less waste. This can be done with a mulching lawn mower or even with a regular mower if done frequently enough. If grass clippings must be collected, then it is best to use them elsewhere in the landscape or garden. Clippings can be composted and used as a soil amendment or used as a mulch.

Benefits of the Don't Bag It program include:

Time Saved

- Annual mowing time is reduced by up to one-third by not bagging clippings.

Energy Saved

- The mower is easier to push with no heavy grass-filled bag attached.

Money Saved

- Fewer garbage bags purchased
- Garbage collection bill is lower. The city does not have to collect or dispose of grass clippings.
- This extends landfill life.

For more information about the Don't Bag It program see Extension leaflets [L-251 Don't Bag It: Mulching with Wood Chips](#), [L-252 Don't Bag It: Leaf Composting](#), and [L-253 Don't Bag It: Lawn Care Plan](#).

## **Mistletoe and Unwanted Fruit Control**

*David Hillock*

Mistletoe in deciduous trees can now be controlled with Florel<sup>®</sup> fruit eliminator. This is a growth regulator that *suppresses* the pest but does not kill it. Re-treatment may be necessary in 2-3 years. Here are a few guidelines to follow when applying this product:

1. Use on dormant trees.
2. Thorough coverage is important. Two applications at 2-3 weeks apart are ideal and do not forget to include a surfactant.
3. Do not spray when temperatures are below 32°F all day long.
4. Apply the maximum label rate.

In addition, this product will prevent fruit set on apple, crabapple, cottonwood, elm, flowering pear, maple, oak, sweetgum and sycamore. Apply before fruit set at full bloom stage. Timing of application is very important.

Some garden centers and nurseries are carrying Florel<sup>®</sup>. However, not all are, so they may have to special order some for you. The cost for small quantities can be relatively expensive.

Note: Even though Florel<sup>®</sup> can suppress mistletoe growth, the best control still is to cut out and remove any infected portions of the tree at the first sign of mistletoe development.

## **Beautiful Butterflies**

*David Hillock*

Let's think ahead as springtime is around the corner, and what we would like to see in our garden, beautiful butterflies. Attracting butterflies is not hard, but will take some planning. Creating habitats for butterflies is an exciting and rewarding experience. Here are some key components for attracting butterflies to your garden:

- Sunny areas – plants that butterflies like require bright sunshine.
- Splashes of color – butterflies are attracted to flowers by color. Groups of flowers are easier to locate than isolated plants.
- Host plants – female butterflies lay their eggs only on certain host plants that will nourish the young caterpillars after they hatch. Grow those plants that supply food for the caterpillars. (butterfly weed, parsley, dill, fennel, rue, passion flower and tulip tree).
- Damp areas – butterflies cannot drink from open water. Wet sand, earth or mud is the best watering holes.

- Basking stones – butterflies often perch on stones to bask in the sun. Basking raises their body temperature so that they are able to fly and remain active.

So, plan now for a butterfly habitat in your backyard this spring and enjoy watching the beauty of nature unfold.

## **Viruses can Negatively Affect Blackberries**

*Eric T. Stafne*

At a recent meeting of the Southern Region of the American Society for Horticultural Science, I read a poster of some research done at Auburn University that documented the impact of blackberry viruses in Alabama. Coming from the University of Arkansas and working with blackberries, I knew that blackberry viruses were a concern; however, what I did not know is the extent to which the viruses existed. In the research poster, a total of 15 blackberry plantings were tested throughout Alabama. The researchers took a total of 239 symptomatic and asymptomatic blackberry tissue samples from 14 different cultivars. What they found was quite disturbing – viruses were found in all 15 locations. They found Tomato Ringspot Virus (ToRSV) in 14 of 15 locations, Impatiens Necrotic Spot Virus (INSV) in all 15 locations, Tobacco Ringspot Virus (TRSV) in 13 of 15 locations and Raspberry Bushy Dwarf Virus (RBDV) in all 15 locations. The most prevalent virus was ToRSV, as it had a 45% incidence rate, followed by INSV at 35%, TRSV at 31% and RBDV at 26%. All of the viruses were widely distributed throughout the state. Of the 14 cultivars tested (Apache, Arapaho, Navaho, Kiowa, Chester, Triple Crown, Loch Ness, Roseborough, Doyle, Chickasaw, Ouachita, Bryson, Choctaw and Shawnee) multiple viruses were found to exist in Navaho, Ouachita and Apache. All others only had a single virus.

Blackberries typically are not negatively affected by a single virus infection, but when a virus complex is found then symptoms such as crumbly fruit and chlorotic and necrotic ring spots on the leaves become apparent. Although virus testing has not been done in Oklahoma, it is likely that some, if not all, of these viruses exist here. My colleagues in other states are now beginning to recommend shorter planting cycles, such as five to six years before renewal. This is a big difference from just a few years ago when we thought blackberry planting could survive for 15 years or more. Until we start seeing evidence of plant decline due to virus infection, there is no reason to recommend shorter cropping cycles; however, we should be vigilant and start looking closely for symptoms like those mentioned above that portend a potential problem.

## **Ten Ponderous Myths Debunked**

*By Sally Ferguson*

For years, backyard ponds and water gardens have had a bad reputation and for years they deserved it. The methods and technology that built the ponds of yesterday often yielded high-maintenance monsters that sucked in time and money much more quickly and efficiently than their debris-clogged pumps sucked in water.

Today, all that has changed. Thanks to new techniques and technologies, a backyard water garden can be a low-maintenance personal paradise. Still, ponding myths persist that may unnecessarily discourage those pining for a water garden of their own.

Following are some common myths and the modern facts that have pushed them aside:

1. Myth: Small water features are less work.  
Fact: As water features get larger, they become easier to maintain. Aquarium hobbyists know it's much easier to achieve a healthy, stable tank with more water, not less. Small water features rarely have the flow or capacity necessary for long-term stability, and soon need lots of maintenance. However, properly designed ponds are able to achieve ecological balance. As water gardens become larger, they also become more stable with each passing year as plants, bacteria colonies and other vital life becomes established.
2. Myth: You should never have algae in your pond.  
Fact: Green algae, in proper proportion, are beneficial plant life. Fish eat it and it's part of the ecology of any living, healthy pond. Pristine UV sterilized or chemically-treated water is dead in comparison. Too much algae has a simple cause: too much sunlight. That's why a well-designed natural pond includes shade sources from landscaping and aquatic plants.
3. Myth: Maintaining a water garden is a constant headache.  
Fact: Ecologically-balanced water gardens let Mother Nature do the heavy lifting. Make sure the water garden you install works with Mother Nature, not against her. Top-quality ecosystem ponds are available and such systems include mechanical and biological filtration, lots of aquatic plants, fish, active bacteria, and plenty of rocks. No water testing, no chemicals, no clogged up filter screens, no standing water, no muck bottom that needs constant draining and cleaning.
4. Myth: Ponds need daily water testing and corrective treatment.  
Fact: If the pond is not chemically-dependent, there's nothing to test for. Mother Nature never tests her water. And, she doesn't use any store bought chemicals or pharmaceuticals. Neither should you. Stick to the program of ecosystem water gardening and let your pond grow healthy on its own.
5. Myth: To keep fish, water gardens need to be deep.  
Fact: Two feet deep is as good as a mile. Fish, including koi, hibernate in ponds just two-feet deep through winters as cold as Minnesota's Zone 4 bone chillers. A small circulating agitator pump and heater are all you need to keep a "breathing hole" in the ice and oxygenate the water for your fish.
6. Myth: Water features are breeding grounds for mosquitoes.  
Fact: Mosquitoes breed in still, standing water. A well-designed backyard water garden has lots of water flow, in which mosquitoes don't like to breed. Also, ponds and water gardens support fish, frogs, toads, and other wildlife that are natural predators of mosquitoes.
7. Myth: Water gardening involves a lot of hard work.  
Fact: Not necessarily. A well-designed ecologically-balanced pond needs only a scoop of powder or liquid bacteria every month or so, the skimmer basket cleaned weekly, plus an annual clean-out in cold climates. In gardening terms, an ecologically-balanced pond is about as much work as maintaining an established perennial border, minus the weeding

and watering. Aquatic plants water themselves. The big maintenance item is a recommended annual spring clean out. Many opt for a contractor to do the spring cleaning (\$200 - \$300).

8. Myth: A water garden costs a fortune.

Fact: A water garden is certainly an investment, but it no longer has to be a money pit. At the most affordable end of the spectrum, DIY kits with everything you need retail for \$700 - \$900, plus another \$600 for the large or live stuff that doesn't come in the box (rocks, pebbles, fish, plants, etc.). Total: \$1,300 – \$1,500, plus a healthy amount of sweat equity for an 8' by 11' pond and waterfall. Professional installations start at around \$4,000 and average \$6,000 to \$8,000. Inexpensive fish and plants are easily found. Running a high efficiency pump 24/7, 365 days a year, will tack about \$30 to \$40 onto your monthly electricity bill. Low-maintenance water gardens are considered good landscaping investments that can pay for themselves in increased home equity.

9. Myth: Predators will eat all you fish.

Fact: Predators are out there, but there are things you can do to protect your fish. Koi lovers beware, in shallow water garden ponds your gazillion dollar prize specimens are at risk, mainly from blue herons or muskrats. But, whether you have pedigree koi or the inexpensive lovable "mutts" that most pond lovers prize, you can fight back. An inexpensive motion-activated water spraying system will deter herons with a timely jet of water. Muskrats are not as common in backyard ponds as they prefer to hunt in large bodies of water. Raccoons don't care to swim for their supper, preferring to dip into the buffet from the banks. A pond that's at least eight-feet wide will deprive these varmints of dry access to the deepest part of the water garden.

10. Myth: Any contractor or landscaper can build a water garden.

Fact: Building a pond and building it right are two different things. Building ecosystem ponds is a relatively new specialty. A good landscaper isn't necessarily knowledgeable in the concept, design or construction that makes an organic water garden work. Also, much of the literature and information still in circulation does not relate to ecosystem water gardening. Make sure that the installer is a trained, certified installer of ecosystem ponds.

Note: This article was reprinted with permission of AquascapeDesigns, Inc. View their website at <http://www.aquascapedesigns.com>.

## **Plow and Prep Field Day 2008**

*Lynn Brandenberger & Sue Gray*

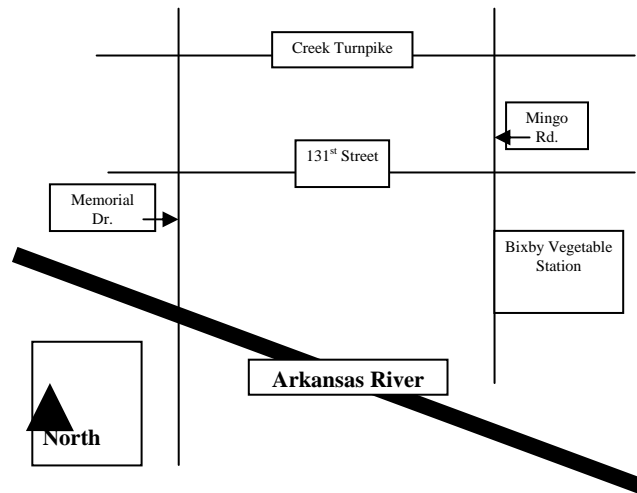
The 2008 Plow and Prep Field Day is set for 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, April 12, 2008 at the Vegetable Research Station in Bixby with an alternate rain-day set for Saturday, April 19, 2008. For further information contact Sue Gray Tulsa County Horticulturist at 918-746-3705. That said, what is Plow and Prep Field Day? It's a field day that targets fresh market vegetable growers and County Extension Educators. This year's Plow and Prep Day will again focus on field preparation for fresh market vegetables including soil preparation, plastic mulch application, and lots more including:

- Soil sampling

- Drip irrigation
- Food safety basics
- Weed control basics
- Where to find crop specific information
- How to setup and calibrate small sprayers (hand-pump & others)

### **Directions to the OSU Vegetable Research Station near Bixby, OK**

The Oklahoma State University Vegetable Research Station is located at: 13711 South Mingo Road in Bixby, a map is included for your convenience. The Station phone number is: 918-369-2441.



### **Upcoming Horticulture Events**

#### **Landscape Plant In-Service Extension Educator Training May 20, 2008, Sunshine Nursery, Clinton, OK**

For more information, please contact Mike Schnelle at 405-744-7361 or [mike.schnelle@okstate.edu](mailto:mike.schnelle@okstate.edu).

#### **Landscape IPM Conference May 28, 2008, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater, OK**

#### **Bixby Field Day June 26, 2008, Oklahoma Vegetable Research Station, Bixby, OK**

For more information, please contact Lynn Brandenberger at 405-744-5408/ [lynn.brandenberger@okstate.edu](mailto:lynn.brandenberger@okstate.edu) or the Research Station at 918-369-2441.

#### **Turf and Landscape Field Day September 17, 2008, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater, OK**

**Greenhouse IPM Conference**  
**November 5, 2008, OSU, 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).