

Horticulture Tips

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

GARDEN TIPS FOR OCTOBER!

David Hillock

Turfgrass

- You can continue to replant or establish cool-season lawns like fescue.
- The mowing height for fescue should be lowered to approximately 2 ½ inches for fall and winter cutting.
- Broadleaf weeds like dandelions can be easily controlled during October ([HLA-6421](#) & [HLA-6601](#)).
- Mow and neatly edge warm-season lawns before killing frost.

Ornamentals

- Plant cool-season annuals like pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, snapdragons and dusty miller when temperatures begin to cool.
- Begin planting spring-flowering bulbs like tulips, hyacinths, crocus and daffodils.
- Good companion plants for bulbs are ground covers such as ajuga, vinca, English ivy, alyssum, moneywort, thrift, phlox, oxalis and leadwort.
- Peonies, daylilies and other spring-flowering perennials should be divided or planted now.
- Dig and store tender perennials like cannas, dahlias and caladiums in a cool, dry location.
- Purchase trees from nurseries and garden centers at this time to select the fall color you prefer.
- Many perennials can be planted at this time and the selection is quite nice.
- Plant fall mums and asters. Keep them watered during dry conditions. Don't crowd since they take a couple of years to reach maturity.
- Plant container-grown trees and shrubs this month.
- Check and treat houseplants for insect pests before bringing them indoors and repot rootbound plants.

Fruits & Vegetables

- Dig sweet potatoes and harvest pumpkins and winter squash.
- Remove green fruit from tomato plants when frost threatens.
- Harvest Oriental persimmons and paw paws as they begin to change color.
- There is still time to plant radishes and mustard in the fall garden.
- Use a cold frame device to plant spinach, lettuce and various other cool-season crops for production most of the winter.
- Plant cool-season cover crops like Austrian winter peas, wheat, clover and rye in otherwise fallow garden plots.
- Remove all debris from the garden to prevent overwintering of various garden pests.
- Start new planting bed preparations now with plenty of organic matter.

Water Gardens

- Take tropical water garden plants indoors when water temperatures near 50°F.
- Close the water garden for the winter by placing hardy plants in the deeper areas of the pool. Stop feeding the fish.
- Cover water gardens with bird netting to catch dropping leaves during the winter months.

Time to Thin out Brambles

Eric T. Stafne

The harvest is over on floricanes-fruiting blackberries and raspberries, so canes are on the slow decline to their demise. October is a great time to remove spent canes because they are much easier to tell apart from primocanes now than during the winter. All canes that fruited this year should be removed (in the case of floricanes (spring/summer)-fruiting varieties). Dead canes create places for insects to overwinter as well as crowding the plant so that adequate sunlight cannot reach its interior. Do you ever wonder why those huge clumps of wild blackberries only have fruit on the outside? All of the dead canes are hogging the space on the inside and not allowing new canes to push forth. Once the dead canes are removed, new space will be created that allows better air flow (important for reduction of disease incidence) and sunlight penetration (important for reduction of disease incidence and fruit production).

Primocane (fall)-fruiting brambles can be treated a little different. If a cane fruited in the spring/summer, it will die and needs to be removed; however, if a cane is just fruiting for the first time in the fall it will continue to live and fruit again in the following spring/summer. The only part that will die is the part that already fruited. Therefore, with primocane-fruiting varieties there are two options: tip back the canes past the point where they fruited in the fall and leave the remainder of the cane to fruit next spring/summer OR after the canes have fruited in the fall cut them all back down to ground level. If you cut them down to ground level, they will only fruit in the fall and not in the spring/summer. Often the spring/summer crop is superior to the fall crop because the flowers are not subjected to the intense late summer heat and generally benefit from better rainfall. Yet, who can argue with blackberries and raspberries being available up until frost in the fall?

The majority of pruning and training can be done in the winter, but removing spent canes early gives you a clearer idea of which canes no longer serve a purpose. By keeping brambles thinned out and properly pruned fruit quality should improve, insect and diseases should decrease, and the number of delicious cobblers and pies should definitely increase.

Early October Weather Suitable for Cool-season Lawn Planting and Renovation

Dennis Martin and David Hillock

Early October still affords some great weather for establishing cool-season lawns in most of Oklahoma, but don't make the mistake of waiting too late into the month. Daytime highs in the low to mid 80s and night time lows in the upper 50s or low 60s coupled with moist soil are near-ideal germination conditions for cool-season turfgrasses. Even areas in southern Oklahoma are usually better off completing seeding by October 15. Cool-season turfgrasses include tall fescue,

perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass and the new interspecific hybrid bluegrasses. The hybrid bluegrasses are crosses between Texas and Kentucky bluegrass. Sodding of cool-season turfgrass can continue through October.

Fact Sheet HLA-6418 covers turfgrass selection, while HLA-6419 covers the establishment (planting method) and HLA-6420 covers the mainstream long-term maintenance practices (mowing, fertilization, irrigation, etc). Find these on the web at the turf collection located at: <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-216>.

There are many satisfactory performing tall fescues. These include but are not limited to Crossfire II, Houndog V, Millenium, Rembrandt Plantation to name just a few. There are dozens of good performers. A blend is a combination of two or more varieties within the same species. A mix is two or more species combined. Blends and mixes are beneficial in cool-season lawns as they broaden the genetic diversity present. In theory, this decreases the likelihood that your lawn will be completely wiped out by a single disease or single insect infestation.

Most importantly, if turf-type quality is expected, one should choose a turf-type rather than a forage type tall fescue. Forage type fescues include Fawn and Alta. General purpose soil stabilizer types include the old K-31, Kentucky 31, KY 31, they get used as a forage and as a lawn but these variations on Kentucky 31 are not true turf-type tall fescue despite what the marketing message on the seed bag might say. Turf-types are selected for improved color, texture, density, slower vertical leaf expansion rate and other important characteristics for lawn use.

Tall fescues are best in medium to light shade. There are no hard and fast rules for “hours of sunlight” required. There are no perfect solutions to dense shade where grasses fail repeatedly, year-in and year-out. It is best to take a hint and if grass is failing in a shaded site many years, it’s time to move on to mulches, shade tolerant perennial ground covers, hardscape elements, etc. Sometimes grass does not die exclusively from shade but rather the combination of shade and tree root competition for nutrients and water in combination with added disease pressure due to less air movement and more grass canopy moisture caused by less air movement in a “tight and mature” landscape.

In lightly shaded areas, mixtures of tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass can sometimes work best. While Kentucky bluegrass is generally not as shade tolerant as tall fescue, it still has some shade tolerance and it has improved brown patch disease and Rhizoctonia blight resistance over that of tall fescue. Brown patch is usually the most serious disease of tall fescue. These mixtures will often have Kentucky bluegrass present at 5 to 10% by weight and tall fescue at 90 to 95%. Remember, there are 10 times as many bluegrass seeds in a pound of bluegrass as there are tall fescue seeds present in a pound of fescue seed so we use about 10 times less bluegrass seed to get a 50/50 species count. Never, use a 100% stand of Kentucky bluegrass in most areas of Oklahoma because pure stands of Kentucky bluegrass in most of Oklahoma can get summer patch disease. Also, older Kentucky bluegrasses such as Park, Newport, South Dakota Common (SD Common), and variety not stated (VNS =when there is not variety name stated) really don’t bring any value to the cool-season mix. So if these are the only ones available locally, you might as well use 100% tall fescue. Most other varieties of Kentucky bluegrass that you might encounter (there are hundreds nationally, and yet few repeatedly available in OK from year to year) are improvements and will benefit the mix!

In recent years hybrid bluegrasses have become available in the market place. Mixes between tall fescue and hybrid bluegrass [are](#) sometimes available on the garden center store shelves. Examples of hybrid bluegrass varieties include the sodded type Reveille (not available in Oklahoma), and seeded types such as Thermal Blue and Dura Blue which can often be found in the national chain stores. During 12 years of testing thus far, hybrid bluegrasses have not proven themselves to be superior to the best of the Kentucky bluegrass varieties in our Oklahoma State University trials.

There is seldom any benefit and there is often detriment created by mixes of cool-season perennial grasses with annual or Italian ryegrass. Yet, if you scout the store shelves, you will find these mixes. Annual ryegrass simply competes with the cool-season perennial grasses in the mix in the cool portion of the year when good growth can take place, and then annual ryegrass, having taken its fair share of the lawn, dies out in the heat. This leaves uninformed consumers in a panic at worst and with unsightly dead areas in their remaining cool-season perennial lawn at best. Avoid mixes of annual ryegrass with the desirable cool-season perennials like tall fescue, perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass.

Autumn Crafts

Shelley Mitchell, 4-H & Youth Programs

Autumn is a great time to collect items for nature crafts. Seed pods, leaves, nuts, fruits and vegetables can all be utilized for crafts. Leaves and flowers can be pressed for projects like bookmarks, decorating boxes or lampshades or dried for potpourri. Fruits and vegetables can be used to stamp interesting shapes onto paper (especially if they are cut in half) or to make pomanders. Berries can be dried and used to make dyes. Pinecones, acorns, walnuts and other tree fruit can be collected to add visual interest to wreaths, to make bird feeders or to paint for holiday centerpieces or decorations. Seeds can be used in mosaics, necklaces and maracas. Even sticks can be utilized for making napkin rings, coasters, pencil holders, etc. Use the autumn bounty to 'shop' for craft supplies. You can get a head start on holiday craft gifts, or save your harvest for indoor winter activities.

Flowers and Foliage for Fall Color

Kim Rebek

Many of us have a renewed excitement about gardening this time of year, the weather has shifted and we are comfortable working in the gardens. We also start to see some of our summer favorites fading away. Perhaps this is what drives us to put in those fall bloomers. We just hate to see the color fade. Or maybe it is just that ingrained association between mums and Halloween.

Whatever the driving force may be, we gardeners are in luck, because there are plenty of plants that we can choose from to add a splash of color to the fall landscape. Perhaps the most common of these is the hardy chrysanthemum. Many of the varieties come in hues of fall color: red, yellow, orange, and rust; but there are also some interesting pinks and purples available. Most people buy their mums from the garden center, but they can also be grown from seed or cutting.

And because they are hardy, plants will survive from year to year. You can also divide your plants in spring to multiply them. In fact, mums benefit from frequent divisions.

Another plant widely used for its fall flower is 'Autumn Joy' sedum, which is a cultivar of *Sedum telephium*. The flower heads begin to form in July and look a bit like broccoli. They start to change to a light pink color in August, then slowly turn a deeper magenta color and eventually a dark, rust-red late in the fall. The seed heads persist, providing interest in the garden throughout the winter. In addition to the flowers, sedum has attractive, succulent leaves. The plant is very easy to maintain and performs best in full sun. If you find your plants are growing too tall and leggy, simply cut them back mid-summer. They will quickly rebound with dense, new growth.

Some of our fall bloomers can be found swaying along roadsides. Asters and goldenrod are two such plants. Some *Solidago* or goldenrod cultivars have been bred for use in the home garden. These cultivars share many of the same features as their wild relatives, such as the showy yellow flowers, but have been selected for improved performance and appearance. Many people do not want to add goldenrod to their home garden because they believe it causes hay fever. But this is not true; the real culprit behind hay fever is ragweed. Goldenrod is certainly underutilized in gardens and has much to offer with its long-lasting blooms.

A great many salvias grace our garden, some annual and others perennial. Many of these will continue to persist well into autumn, such as Autumn Sage, *Salvia gregii*, cultivar 'Pink Preference'. It was a 2004 Oklahoma Proven selection. Another salvia for fall is Mexican Bush Sage, *Salvia leucantha*. This species produces very showy flowers that stand above the foliage. The flower itself is small and white, but it extends from a beautiful, velvety purple calyx. These calyces are born on long stems that extend 6 to 12 inches.

Nandina domestica, often called Heavenly Bamboo is wonderful in the fall. It is not actually a bamboo, it is in the barberry family. *Nandina* has a number of attributes; chief among these is the light, airy evergreen foliage. In autumn the foliage changes from green to a red, orange or bronze color. As the plant matures, you may find it producing large flower clusters and red berries. The flower clusters can be dried for use in arrangements. In fact, the foliage itself makes a nice addition to fresh flower arrangements. This is a compact plant that is very versatile in the landscape and certainly a good choice for year-round interest.

Ornamental or flowering cabbage is a very popular fall and winter plant. The ornamental portion is not actually a flower, but rather rings of fancy, colorful foliage. Plants are very showy, with multi-colored foliage in mixtures of green, purple, pink and red. The color often does not start to show until after cool weather has set in for a long period. So this is a great plant to set out late in the season. You will also find flowering or ornamental kale, which is a related plant that has ruffled foliage. These are very hardy plants that can tolerate temperatures as low as 5°F. So when everything else in the garden has succumbed to winters chill, your kale and cabbage will steal the show.

Selecting Fall Color

David Hillock

Fall is an excellent time to plant trees and shrubs. It is also a good time to select plants for their fall color. Some plants are selected for vivid fall colors and propagated in a way that the fall color is consistent from year to year, if weather conditions cooperate. Some species are grown from seed so genetics provides widely variable fall color from plant to plant. For example, Caddo Sugar Maple and Chinese Pistache grown from seed will provide an array of fall color from yellow-green to vivid orange and red. For species such as these, observing them in the garden center in the fall allows you to select the colors you are interested in.

The Magic of Autumn

David Hillock

I remember as a kid growing up in Iowa the awesome fall colors of the many maples, oaks and other species common to the area. We would rake the leaves up into big piles and then play in them for hours. It was even legal back then to burn your leaves and roast marshmallows and hotdogs over the fire (now-a-days it is prohibited in most communities). Much of Oklahoma can also have spectacular fall displays. But what causes those green leaves to turn colors in the fall?

The green in leaves is actually chlorophyll, which is responsible for catching the sun's energy and converting it into energy for plant growth. During the summer the chlorophyll is high and masks other pigments in the leaf. When fall approaches the chlorophyll declines and the other pigments shine through. Pigments that are present include anthocyanins, which are purple and red, and carotenoids and tannins which provide the yellow, orange, and brown hues.

Weather conditions play a vital role in our fall colors. Ideal weather conditions that lead to the spectacular fall colors are bright sunny days and cool nights. Prolonged warm spells in the fall and cloudy rainy weather can lead to poor fall color. Drier soils in fall, but not drought conditions, also lead to brighter fall colors.

Upcoming Horticulture Events

Tree Care Conference

October 8, 2008, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater, OK

Greenhouse IPM Conference

November 5, 2008, OSU, Stillwater, OK

Water Issues in Horticulture Conference

December 4, 2008, Stillwater, OK

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