

Horticulture Tips

December 2008

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

GARDEN TIPS FOR DECEMBER!

David Hillock

Lawn & Turf

- Remove leaves from cool-season grasses or mow with a mulching mower. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Continue mowing cool-season lawns on a regular basis. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Continue to control broadleaf weeds in well-established warm- or cool-season lawns with a post-emergent broadleaf weed killer. ([HLA-6421](#))

Tree & Shrubs

- Select a freshly cut Christmas tree. Make a new cut prior to placing in tree stand. Add water daily.
- Live Christmas trees are a wise investment, as they become permanent additions to the landscape after the holidays.
- Light prunings of evergreens can be used for holiday decorations. Be careful with sap that can mar surfaces.

Flowers

- Apply winter mulch to protect rose bush bud unions and other perennials. Wait until after several early freezes or you will give insects a good place to winter.
- Poinsettias must have at least six hours of bright, indirect light daily. Keep plants away from drafts.

Fruits & Nuts

- Cover strawberry plants with a mulch about 3-4 inches thick if plants are prone to winter injury.
- Wait to prune fruit trees until late February or March.

General

- Keep all plants watered during dry conditions even though some may be dormant.
- Irrigate all plantings at least 24 hours before hard-freezing weather if soil is dry. ([HLA-6404](#))
- Order gardening supplies for next season.
- Now is a great time to design and make structural improvements in your garden and landscape.
- Send for mail order catalogs if you are not already on their mailing lists.
- Christmas gift ideas for the gardener might include tools, garden books, magazine subscriptions, *Oklahoma Gardening* educational tapes or membership to Oklahoma Botanical Garden & Arboretum.
- Clean and fill bird feeders.

- Make sure indoor plants are receiving enough light or set up an indoor fluorescent plant light.
- Till garden plots without a cover crop to further expose garden pests to harsh winter conditions.
- Visit your county office to obtain gardening fact sheets for the new gardening season.
- Join a horticulture, plant or urban forestry society and support community “greening” or “beautification” projects.
- Review your garden records so you can correct past mistakes. Purchase a new gardening journal or calendar to keep the new year’s gardening records.

GARDEN TIPS FOR JANUARY!

David Hillock

- If precipitation has been deficient (1” of snow = ~ 1/10” of water), water lawns, trees and shrubs, especially broadleaf and narrowleaf evergreens. Double check moisture in protected or raised planters.
- Check on supplies of pesticides. Secure a copy of current recommendations and post them in a convenient place. Dilution and quantity tables are also useful.
- If you did not treat young pines for tip borers in November, do so before March.
- Check that gardening tools and equipment are in good repair—sharpen, paint, and repair mowers, edgers, sprayers and dusters.
- Inspect your irrigation system and replace worn or broken parts.
- Control overwintering insects on deciduous trees or shrubs with dormant oil sprays applied when the temperature is above 40°F in late fall and winter. Do not use “dormant” oils on evergreens. ([EPP-7306](#))
- A product containing glyphosate plus a postemergent broadleaf herbicide can be used on dormant bermudagrass in January or February when temperatures are above 50°F for winter weed control. ([HLA-6421](#))

Managing Deer in the Landscape

Kim Rebek

White tail deer can be a serious problem in many areas of Oklahoma, especially during the lean winter months. Luckily, there are many options available for managing deer in the landscape. The most effective of these is the use of exclusion fences. Deer can easily jump over many decorative fences. To keep deer out we need to use something different. Two common options are electric fences and eight-foot deer fences. Of course, fences obtrusive in the landscape. One way to make these fences less noticeable is to place them at the wood edge where they blend in with the surrounding shrubs and brush. Many deer fences are constructed in such a way as to become nearly invisible from a distance.

If fences are not an option, you can try repellents that have an unpleasant taste or odor. Area repellents utilize odors and are generally less effective than contact repellents that deter feeding

through bad-tasting substances. Repellents can reduce damage, but will not entirely eliminate damage. A deer will eat just about anything if it is hungry enough.

You have probably heard people suggest a wide variety of repellents including human hair, bar soap, cat or dog feces, and moth balls. Most of these have shown little impact on deer browsing in scientific research; however, human hair and bar soap can reduce browsing up to 35 percent. The repellents that have demonstrated the best efficacy are thiram-based contact repellents such as Chaperone and Spotrete-F.

Selecting plants that deer avoid is another simple way to manage these animals. Of course, avoiding certain plants is not always the best solution, particularly in the vegetable garden, where many of our most common vegetables are frequently browsed. While no plant is entirely deer-proof, there are some plants that deer tend to avoid. Some plants produce odors in their foliage that deter deer feeding, such as Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) and Thyme (*Thymus* sp.). Others are unpalatable. The spiky rosettes of Hens and Chicks (*Sempervivum tectorum*) are avoided by deer. So is the Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia compressa*) for obvious reasons.

Unfortunately, some of our favorite plants are also favorites of deer. In spring, we love a garden full of tulips – and so do the deer. If deer are a problem for you, you may wish to plant alternative bulbs, such as daffodils or hyacinths, which are less preferred by deer.

You may wish to incorporate several of these tactics, such as planting resistant species, and protecting already established, browsing-prone plants with a repellent. Deer fencing may also be an option for small spaces or vegetable gardens. You may need to experiment with different tactics until you find what works best in your landscape.

There is no reason to let deer keep you from enjoying a beautiful garden. Turn to OSU Factsheet number [F-6427 \(Ornamental and Garden Plants: Controlling Deer Damage\)](#) for a list of herbaceous and woody plants that are rarely damaged by deer.

Deicing Affects on Landscape Plants

David Hillock

Cold temperatures usually bring ice and snow making it difficult to travel for both motorists and pedestrians. Public safety during this time is a high priority and usually addressed by the use of deicing compounds. While these deicing compounds make it safer for us, they often damage concrete surfaces, automobiles and landscape plants.

There are several deicing compounds, each with pros and cons.

Sodium chloride (NaCl) is the most common and known as table or rock salt. It is the least expensive, most widely used and is most effective when temperatures are above 15°F. Unfortunately sodium chloride is very corrosive and damaging to landscape plants and excessive sodium in the soil can destroy its structure.

Calcium chloride (CaCl₂) dissolves readily, acts quickly and is effective in very cold temperatures - down to -20°F. It is, however, highly corrosive to concrete and metals, but slightly less damaging to plants than sodium chloride.

Potassium chloride (KCl) is a natural material used for fertilizer, but is highly corrosive as a deicer. It is less damaging than sodium chloride to plants.

Calcium magnesium acetate (CMA) is an environmentally friendly compound derived from dolomitic limestone and acetic acid. CMA is considered safer for plant material, non-corrosive to concrete surfaces and biodegradable. It is also effective at melting ice to around 15°F. The downside, it is 30 to 40 times more expensive.

Deicing materials are salts that melt ice, creating a brine solution (salty water) which freeze at lower temperatures. The problem in the landscape occurs when this brine solution is splashed onto plant foliage or runs off pavement into the soil. An accumulation in the soil near plant roots results in damage to the plants. Plants suffer a salt-induced water shortage, even though there may be moisture in the soil, because roots are unable to absorb sufficient water.

To minimize damage by deicing materials in the landscape consider the following approaches:

- Mechanical removal – the less ice and snow present, the less deicing material needed.
- Use abrasive materials in conjunction with mechanical and/or deicing materials – abrasives such as sand have few impacts on the environment. They do not melt ice, but do improve traction on slippery surfaces.
- Plan ahead – plant salt tolerant plants in areas receiving large amounts of deicing material; locate salt sensitive plants away from areas deicing materials are used; use hardscapes (gutters, barriers) to channel runoff away from planting areas; do not pile snow containing deicing materials onto planting areas; and irrigate once heavily in the spring to leach salts away from root zone.

The Winter Landscape

David Hillock

The winter can be a true test of the strength of a landscape design. With most of the landscape plants resting during the winter months, things of interest may be scarce. A key element in landscape design to sustain it year round is the hardscape – those nonliving materials often used to establish the framework and backbone of the garden. A good hardscape will be pleasing, functional and provide interest during the winter months when many plants are dormant.

Hardscape materials include rock, pavers, concrete, wood, etc. These materials are used to create pathways, walls, fences, borders, benches, arbors, sculptures and other structures. Using hardscape materials that are naturally found in your area, such as native stone, will help it tie into the natural surroundings. Using materials that are complementary to the materials used to build the home helps tie the home and landscape together. The landscape then becomes an extension of the home as well.

Many plants also provide interest during winter months. Evergreen trees and shrubs hold their leaves and colors year round and contribute form, texture and mass to the garden. Some deciduous trees and shrubs have interesting or colorful bark that can be seen easier and be more appreciated after the leaves have fallen. There are also a number of species that produce colorful fruits that persist into the winter months and may provide food for wildlife as an added bonus. Herbaceous perennials may contribute to the winter landscape as well with their dried seed heads and interesting forms and shapes. Ornamental grasses are particularly attractive as they take on neutral colors and sway back and forth in the breeze.

As we move into the winter months, it is a good time to evaluate the landscape and identify its strengths and weaknesses. It is also an excellent time to work on the hardscape features of the garden. Need some inspiration? There are several excellent books and magazines full of creative design ideas; just visit your local bookstore or library. These books and magazines make great Christmas gifts for the avid gardener in the family too.

Educational Activities for Fruit Crops and Pecans to be offered in 2009

Eric T. Stafne

The Grape Management Short Course and the Pecan Management Short Course will be offered in 2009 starting in March (grape). These courses still have space available to anyone who is interested, but I especially encourage county educators to attend. One county educator took the Grape Management Short Course for graduate credit this past year. This option is open to any county educator who needs to fulfill coursework for graduate education requirements. The online Pecan Management Course is also available to county educators who don't have the time to attend the on location course.

The Viticulture Education Program is available for any county educator to participate in. This is an integrative program that combines coursework from OSU-Stillwater, OSU-OKC, and/or Tulsa Community College, as well as the short courses and workshops done through OCES. If anyone needs more information on this program please contact me. A county educator who deals a lot with grapes can go through this program and gain a substantial amount of knowledge.

Some grape-related workshops will also be offered throughout the year. I will offer Grape Pruning workshops in late February or early March at the Cimarron Valley Research Station in Perkins, OSU-OKC, and possibly at the Noble Foundation in Ardmore. I will also be presenting a workshop on blackberry production at the Cimarron Valley Research Station in April. The date is still tentative, but is currently set for Wednesday, April 8 at 8 a.m. A fantastic opportunity is available for county educators this year at the Oklahoma-Arkansas Horticulture Industries Show. It will be held at the Holiday Inn City Center in Fort Smith, Arkansas on January 16 and 17. Don't miss this opportunity! Also, don't forget the Oklahoma Pecan Growers' Association meeting scheduled for June 1-3 in Oklahoma City.

I am always looking for willing participants to help host and present workshops, demonstrations, tailgate meetings, etc. If you believe there is sufficient interest out there in your county to do an

educational program for any fruit crop or pecans we can set it up. Contact me for more information concerning any of these educational opportunities.

Strawberry Season May be Just Around the Corner

Jim Shrefler

At least it may not be that far off. About 35 people attended a strawberry production workshop that was held Tuesday, November 11 at the Oklahoma County Extension Office. There seems to be a growing interest in this crop. Specifically, this interest involves the production of this small fruit as an annual crop. The way this is done, plants are obtained in the fall and planted somewhere about the period of September to October. Plants will become established in the fall, slow down growth during the winter, and resume growth about the time when March rolls around. While there are still details to be worked out regarding the best choices of cultivars, growers at the meeting seemed to be pleased with the results they have received so far. This annual crop system for strawberries often makes use of plastic mulch or landscape fabric coverings of the planting beds. These beds may be in an open garden or may be within a hoop house or cold frame. When grown in the hoop house, plant growth can resume a little earlier in the spring to enable an early crop. Speakers at the meeting included Mr. Steve Upson, Noble Foundation Horticulturist. Steve has “pioneered” the use of hoop houses for strawberry production in the state and has a wealth of knowledge to share on this growing technology. Dr. George Driever, OSU IPM Specialist, talked on the diseases of strawberries and provided growers with some pointers on how to avoid disease problems with this crop. Finally, growers shared their experiences on growing strawberries on their farms. Discussions on varieties, planting techniques and other details made for an interesting afternoon.

Chocolate

Shelley Mitchell

We are in the midst of “eating season”—that season that stretches from Halloween to Super Bowl Sunday and presents us with many eating occasions. One of the many foods consumed heavily during “eating season” is chocolate. How much do you know about chocolate? Chocolate is made from cacao seeds, the fruit of the Cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*). “Theobroma” means “food of the gods” (appropriate, yes?). Cacao trees grow in tropical regions within 20 degrees of the equator. They need a warm, humid climate with regular rainfall. Cacao trees grow in the shade and produce fruit for about 50 years. The cacao’s flowers are pollinated by tiny flies that live in debris on the ground beneath the trees. The fruit of the cacao tree is a huge berry called a cacao pod. The pods sprout from the trunk and branches. The pineapple-sized pods contain about 30-40 almond-shaped seeds. These seeds taste bitter because of some of the chemicals inside them, like caffeine and theobromine.

Cacao trees were grown extensively throughout Central and South America long before settlers arrived from Europe. Natives used cacao seeds as currency in addition to consuming them. Chocolate, made by fermenting, drying, roasting, and grinding cacao beans, was mostly drunk. It was part of a drink that also included chili peppers, and that was dyed red to look like blood.

Needless to say, many Europeans found this drink an acquired taste and soon replaced the chili peppers with sugar. By the 17th century, the drink was so popular in England that ‘chocolate houses’ threatened the existence of the traditional pub.

In the United States, chocolate is usually consumed as a food instead of a drink. Contrary to popular opinion, chocolate does not cause acne, nor does the sugar in chocolate contribute to cavities any more than the sugar in other foods. Chocolate does have a lot of saturated fat, which can lead to an increase in cholesterol, and a lot of calories, which can lead to obesity, depending on the amount consumed. However, cacao seeds also contain antioxidants that can help lower the risk of heart disease. The darker the chocolate, the more antioxidants present. Chocolate also contains anandamide, a neurotransmitter, that, together with the stimulants caffeine, theobromine, and phenylethylamine, lead to the ‘good feelings’ many people get when they consume chocolate.

In whatever form you choose to consume chocolate, you are eating a food that has a long and interesting history. Chocolate is truly an American food that has been eaten (or drunk) for many many years in many forms. Incidentally, chocolate chip cookies are also an American (accidental) invention. Ruth Wakefield, co-owner of the tourist lodge named Toll House Inn, was making her popular Butter Drop Do cookies but found herself without the baker’s chocolate she needed. To substitute, she broke up a semi-sweet chocolate bar, assuming the chocolate ‘chips’ would melt completely, as does baker’s chocolate. Well, they didn’t, but no one complained about it. That chocolate bar had been a gift from Andrew Nestle of the Nestle Chocolate Company. Soon, his candy bars and her recipe became linked, and the rest is history.

2008 Oklahoma Cucurbit Production and Marketing Annual Meeting

Jim Shrefler

The program is finalized and preparations are being made for the 2008 Cucurbit Production and Marketing Annual Meeting. This year’s program will address various aspects of growing cucurbits and other vegetables using plastic mulch and drip irrigation. It promises to be a cucurbit-vegetable-information packed day! Why not plan to join us to hear what’s new about things like weed control, irrigation management and soil fertility management in this type of production setting. This year’s meeting will be held Wednesday, December 10, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Fairgrounds Community Building in Chickasha. The meeting brochure is now available at http://www.lane-ag.org/Meetings/meetings_events.htm. You may also call 580-889-7343 or send an email to jim.shrefler@okstate.edu to request a brochure. A noon meal will be provided. We ask that those planning to attend call the Grady County Extension Office at 405-224-2216.

Oklahoma State Pecan Show 2008

Becky Carroll

Be sure to get the word out to everyone to enter their best pecans in the state show this year. There will not be any qualifying regional or district pecan shows this year. However, some county/area shows will be held at the discretion of the County Extension Educator. Growers are encouraged to participate in county shows if available. Winning entries from county shows will be sent to the state show. If no county/area show is available, growers may enter pecans directly by sending samples to Becky Carroll, 358 Ag Hall, OSU, Stillwater, OK 74078. Samples should arrive by January 16, 2009.

Samples should be entered in a sealed plastic or paper bag. Label the bag on the outside and place a label inside the bag. Information should include exhibitors name and address, county, and type of pecan entered. Be sure to follow the guidelines that are listed below before sending entries.

A few helpful hints: Take the time to select pecans that are all the same cultivar, or same size and shape natives – don't send mixed pecans. Select uniform, clean, uncracked pecans. Presentation can make the difference between two very similar samples. Make sure to send 2 pounds of pecans in a labeled and sealed bag.

General Rules and Guidelines

- All entries must be grown in Oklahoma during the current season.
- Each entry shall consist of two pounds of nuts.
- Entries deemed unworthy by the judges will not compete for awards.
- Label each entry as to exhibitor's name, address and cultivar of nuts. If more than one native (seedling) pecan exhibit is made, identify the nuts from separate trees by numbers. Only one exhibit of each cultivar or native tree may be entered by one individual.
- Each entry will compete in one of the following 28 classes:

1. Apache	12. Maramec	23. Success
2. Barton	13. Mohawk	24. Western
3. Burkett	14. Pawnee	25. Wichita
4. Cheyenne	15. Peruche	26. Other Cultivars
5. Choctaw	16. SanSaba Improved	27. Large-Native
6. Comanche	17. Schley (eastern)	(seedling) 60 nuts/lb
7. Graking	18. Shawnee	or larger
8. Gratex	19. Shoshoni	28. Small-Native
9. Kanza	20. Sioux	(seedling) more than 60
10. Kiowa	21. Squirrels Delight	nuts/lb
11. Mahan	22. Stuart	
- Each grower is allowed to participate at one county show of his or her choice.
- Each grower is allowed to enter one entry in each show class with the exception of Class 26 (Other Cultivars), Class 27 (Large-seedling) and Class 28 (Small- seedling)
- Each grower may enter one entry from each native (seedling) tree.
- Entries should be shipped or mailed to arrive at the show at least one day prior to the deadline.
- County pecan shows will not be affected by these rules and procedures.

- Only first and second place winners in each class of each county/area show will be eligible to compete in the State Pecan Show. Following each county show, eligible entries will be placed in cold storage, and judged before the Oklahoma Pecan Growers Annual Meeting. At that time, the winning entries will be displayed with awards and recognitions. All entries will become the property of the OPGA.
- First, second, and third place winners in each class at the State Pecan Show will receive ribbons.
- State Pecan Show Special Awards – Plaques will be awarded for the largest pecan entry, the entry having the highest kernel percentage, the champion native and the best entry of the show.
- If a qualifying show is not available, growers may submit entries in accordance with these guidelines directly to the State Show. Entries in the state show must be received by January 16, 2009 at the following address:

Oklahoma State University
Department of Horticulture & LA
Attn: Becky Carroll
358 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Upcoming Horticulture Events

**Water Issues in Horticulture Conference
December 4, 2008, Stillwater, OK**

**Horticulture Industries Show (HIS)
January 16-17, 2009, Holiday Inn City Center in Fort Smith, AR**

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

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