

# Horticulture Tips

## September 2009

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.
- 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.

#### Vegetables

- 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.

#### Lawn

- Last nitrogen fertilizer application of the year on warm-season grasses should be applied no later than September 15<sup>th</sup>. ([HLA-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 second week of September. ([HLA-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. ([HLA-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. ([HLA-6419](#))
- White grub damage can become visible this month. Apply appropriate soil insecticide if white grubs are a problem ([EPP-7306](#)). Water product into soil.

**Healthy Roots = Healthy Grass**

*Justin Quetone Moss*

Proper fertilization can benefit turfgrass if applied according to certain recommended procedures. Bermudagrass is a warm-season grass with the majority of root growth occurring during the summer months. Cool-season grasses such as tall fescue may lose roots during the hot summer months, but the fall and spring are crucial for root growth. A lawn with a healthy root system will be better equipped to survive moisture and temperature extremes than those with poor root systems.

It is not necessary for homeowners to fertilize bermudagrass or zoysiagrass after early September in Oklahoma. Late, heavy applications of fertilizers containing Nitrogen can actually be detrimental to bermudagrass and zoysiagrass health by encouraging lush shoot growth which can sometimes lead to severe disease and/or winter injury. On the other hand, cool-season lawns such as tall fescue can benefit from a mid-late September fertilization with Nitrogen at a rate of 1 lb of actual Nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. As always, be sure to conduct a lawn soil test before applying fertilizers to your yard. You can refer to the soil testing collection procedures and fertilizer schedule as outlined in OSU Extension Fact Sheet [HLA-6420](#). If you have further questions about fertilizing your lawn during the fall, contact your local OSU County Extension Educator.

## **Grape Viruses Becoming More Prevalent in Oklahoma**

*Eric T. Stafne*

It is normal for grapevine leaves to change from green to yellow or red in the fall. That is the natural process of senescence of which timing is coordinated with the onset of acclimation. However, when leaves start to turn a combination of red and green in July it is not a normal situation. Since the late 1990s there has been a great influx of grapevines from nurseries outside of Oklahoma planted. Some come from the East Coast, some from the West Coast, and some from the Midwest. Frankly, the origin of the virus-infected vines is unknown, but they are showing up in greater numbers.

The most common virus observed in Oklahoma is the Leafroll virus. This virus is found in most grape-growing areas. Symptoms of the Leafroll virus are very distinctive, especially in red grape cultivars. Leaves turn a yellow or red-purple color usually starting in July. The main veins remain green. As the season progresses toward harvest, the leaves will begin to curl downward around the edges. How the virus spreads is still under investigation by researchers in many parts of the country. The main way it spreads from place to place is infected nursery stock. But how does the nursery stock become infected? Insects like the mealybug can vector the virus, but that method is usually very slow. So, the main vectoring mechanism is still unknown.

Some vines can carry the virus but be asymptomatic. These vines can act as “carriers” that may infect other vines with appropriate vectors. The virus itself does not kill grapevines, but is rather an incurable chronic condition. The vine will become weaker over time and fruit clusters may become increasingly smaller over time with weak color and low sugar content.

If a virus is suspected, the vine can be tested at Oklahoma State University's Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Lab (<http://entopl.okstate.edu/Pddl/index.htm>). To see a photo of the virus go to: [http://www.grapes.okstate.edu/grape\\_pests.html](http://www.grapes.okstate.edu/grape_pests.html).

## Pruning Hedges

*David Hillock*

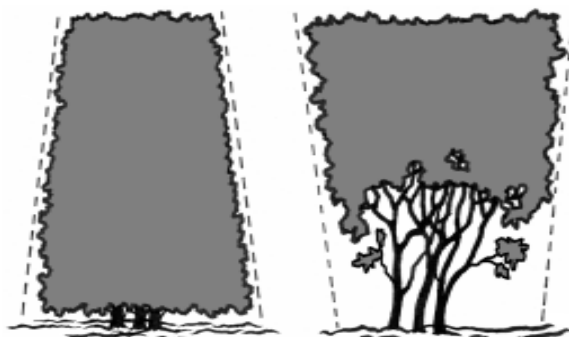
Hedges are a row of plants that merge into a solid linear mass. They have served gardeners for centuries as screens, fences, walls and edging.

A well-shaped hedge is no accident. It must be trained from the beginning. Establishing a deciduous hedge begins with selection of nursery stock. Choose young trees or shrubs one to two feet high, preferably multiple-stemmed. When planting, cut the plants back to six or eight inches; this induces low branching. Late in the first season or before bud-break in the next season, prune off half of the new growth. The following year, again trim off half.

In the third year, start shaping. Trim to the desired shape before the hedge grows to its desired size. Never allow plants to grow untrimmed to the final height before shearing; by that time, it is too late to get maximum branching at the base. Do not allow lower branches to be shaded out. After the hedge has reached the desired dimensions, trim closely in order to keep the hedge within chosen bounds.

Evergreen nursery stock for hedging need not be as small as deciduous material and should not be cut back when planted. Trim lightly after a year or two. Start shaping as the individual plants merge into a continuous hedge. Do not trim too closely because many needle-bearing evergreens do not easily generate new growth from old wood.

Hedges are often shaped with flat tops and vertical sides; however, this unnatural shape is seldom successful. As far as the plant is concerned, the best shape is a natural form, with a rounded or slightly pointed top, with the sides slightly tapering to form a wide base.



**Proper pruning**

**Improper pruning**

After plants have been initially pruned to include low branching, maintain by trimming the top narrower than the bottom so that sunlight can reach all of the plant leaves.

These questions often arise: How often should a hedge be trimmed? When should it be trimmed? Answers to these common questions depend to some extent on how formal an appearance is desired. In general, trim before the new growth exceeds one foot. Hedges of slow-growing plants such as boxwood need to be trimmed sooner. Excessive untrimmed growth will kill lower leaves and will also pull the hedge out of shape. Trimming frequency depends on the kind of shrub, the season, and desired formal appearance.

What can be done with a large, overgrown, bare-bottomed and misshapen hedge? If it is deciduous, the answer is fairly simple. In spring before leaves appear, prune to one foot below desired height. Then carefully trim for the next few years to give it the desired shape and fullness. Occasionally, hedge plants may have declined too much to recover from this treatment, making it necessary to replace them.

Rejuvenating evergreen hedges is more difficult. As a rule, evergreens cannot tolerate the severe pruning described above. Arborvitae and Yew may be exceptions under certain circumstances. Other evergreen hedges may have to be replaced.

**Tools for trimming hedges** – What tools should be used to trim hedges? The traditional pair of scissor-action hedge shears is still the best all-around tool. It cuts much better and closer than electric trimmers, which often break and tear twigs. Hand shears can be used on any type of hedge, while electric trimmers do poorly on large-leafed and wiry-twiggled varieties, sometimes jamming on thick twigs. Hand shears are also quieter, safer, and less likely to gouge the hedge or harm the operator.

Hand pruners are useful in removing a few stray branches and are essential if an informal look is desired. Large, individual branches can be removed with loppers or a pruning saw. Chain saws are not recommended for use on hedges.

## **Trees Add Value to a Landscape**

*David Hillock*

Trees can be a valuable asset to the landscape when the right species has been planted and it has been placed in the right spot.

Trees offer characteristics and attributes like shape, height, size growth habit, color, and flowering and non-flowering features. Trees add to the year-round interest by providing some backbone to the overall look of the landscape. In addition to aesthetic qualities, trees add utilitarian value such as wind protection, shade, wildlife habitat, visual screening and other benefits to homeowners. In the community they contribute to the atmosphere of peace of mind and relaxation.

The wrong tree in the wrong place though, could lead to failure, disappointment, and at times, costly repairs. A tree placed too close to a home, sidewalk or patio could result in damage from branches or roots. A tree that produces fruits if placed too close to a patio or driveway will be a nuisance and require constant cleanup.

Small landscapes should avoid very large trees. Be sure to select a species that is well adapted to the region. A plant that is stressed due to an inability to adapt to the local climate will often be short lived.

Below are some suggested tree species that grow well throughout most areas of Oklahoma.

### **Shade Trees (40-60')**

Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)  
Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*)  
Caddo Maple (*Acer saccharum* 'Caddo')  
Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*)  
Japanese Zelkova (*Zelkova serrata*)  
Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)  
Lacebark or Chinese Elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*)  
Shumard Oak (*Quercus shumardii*)  
Silver Linden (*Tilia tomentosa*)

### **Small Trees (20-40')**

American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*)  
Chinese Pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*)  
Cedar Elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*)  
Crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*)  
European Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*)  
Goldenraintree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*)  
Oklahoma Redbud (*Cercis canadensis* ssp. *texensis* 'Oklahoma')  
Shantung Maple (*Acer truncatum*)  
Vitex, Chastetree (*Vitex negundo*)  
Washington Hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*)

## **Children's Gardens – Engaging Kids, Managing Facilities**

*Shelley Mitchell*

Most youth visitors to children's gardens are between the ages of three and seven. They are not there to read signs and walk slowly on sidewalks, admiring the specimens; they are there to engage with the plants and environment. A list of rules will probably be disregarded, especially during moments of excitement. Youth gardens need to be managed with those facts in mind, to keep the kids happy while minimizing staff time spent supervising.

Most youth are not happy with just observing plants. They want to play. If you provide areas where exploration is welcome, there will be less damage in more fragile areas. Provide places where children can dig. Show them how to look for creatures living in the soil. If possible, leave a fallen log in place and let the children observe the organisms that use it as home. Let them look for fungus and slime molds on rotting wood. If the log is very big, you will want to deter

climbing. A good way to deter climbing is to strategically place rose bushes or other thorny plants wherever there is climbing access.

Create special garden areas that invite imaginative play. A 'fairy house construction garden', with pieces of bark, twigs, stones, and other natural items invites kids to create homes for gnomes and fairies. Get some cheap toy cars and leave them in a 'Hot Wheels garden' with wide dirt paths, log 'bridges' or tunnels, and tough plants spaced far apart. Park a canoe in the middle of the children's area (make sure it is well-anchored).

Let youth get involved in the maintenance of the garden. If you have a koi pond, have scheduled fish feeding times and invite the kids to feed the fish. Install hand pumps and have some buckets or colorful (small) watering cans available. The children can help water the plants (identify 'thirsty' plants with big water drop-shaped signs).

Signs in a children's garden should be simple, with pictures to interest the youth and help them understand the sign. Mulch any paths that lead to shiny objects such as gazing balls, bird feeders, or any other item of interest. The kids will be drawn to such objects, so make it easier on maintenance staff by directing the kids along particular routes using obvious paths. To protect sensitive plants, use hoop fencing.

If there is water, children will find a way to get into it. To keep them out of the pond, provide alternative water play – hoses, waterfalls, sprinklers. People will usually use alternatives if you provide them. A stream will have all sorts of natural and manmade objects thrown into it (What floats? What goes downstream faster?), so if it is a pump-driven stream, be sure to install a net or filter to keep it running smoothly.

Playhouses may seem like a great idea, but they invite out-of-sight places for deviant behavior – graffiti, bullying, finger pinching in doors, vandalism (peeling paint, carving initials), bathroom breaks, and more. A nice alternative is to have a playhouse façade, but not an enclosed room. Alternatives to playhouses are easy – plant a stand of tall grass, corn or bamboo, but leave a little room in the middle big enough for kids to get into. Use tree stumps as chairs and tables, and 'tree cookies' as plates. Think outside of the box to manage garden areas so that children can enjoy them 'their way'. They will have a lot more fun if they are given permission (silent or otherwise) to engage with the plants.

## **Upcoming Horticulture Events**

### **Oklahoma Market Gardening School**

September 22 through November 10, 2009, Noble Foundation, Ardmore

### **Tree Care Conference**

October 28, 2009, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater

### **Global Horticulture**

December 2, 2009, Stillwater

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