

Horticulture Tips

March 2012

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

GARDEN TIPS FOR MARCH!

David Hillock, Consumer Horticulturist

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 postemergent 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 1½ to 3½ 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 liriop 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](#)).

Planting Strawberries

Laura Payne, Volunteer/Education Coordinator, The Botanic Garden at OSU

Strawberries are a simple fruit to grow in the home garden. They can be grown successfully throughout our state. Site selection is important. You will want to choose a spot that receives full sun, because shade can reduce fruit set. Irrigation is also something you will need to consider, so choose a site close to a water source. Strawberries have several diseases in common with other berry plants as well as crops like tomatoes, potatoes and peppers. Be sure the site you select has not been used for any of these crops for several years.

Strawberries are grouped into three general categories. The first are June-bearing strawberries, which produce a single crop from May through mid-June in Oklahoma. They are the best adapted for Oklahoma and are available in early-, mid-, and late-season cultivars. Ever-bearing strawberries produce berries from May to mid-June, and again in the fall. Overall production may not be as high as that of June-bearing varieties. The final type of strawberry is called day-neutral. These produce fruits all season, but they are sensitive to heat and are not recommended for Oklahoma. Be sure to buy certified, disease-free plants from a reputable supplier when selecting cultivars and purchasing plants. Planting more than one cultivar with different maturation times is a great way to extend the harvest season.

Strawberries can be planted in a raised bed, in mounded rows or simply in beds in the ground. However, when you raise the soil, you improve drainage. Mix a thick, 3 or 4 inch layer of compost into the soil to add organic matter. As you prepare the bed, limit the width to around 3 or 4 feet so that you can easily reach in to harvest. If you are planting multiple rows of strawberries, leave 4 feet between the rows.

Strawberries are planted in February or March, but you want to watch the weather. Avoid planting just before a cold spell. Strawberry plants are typically sold bare-root, and need to be protected from drying out during planting. Keep plants in a bucket of water or wrap them in a damp towel during planting. Before setting out the plants, remove all but the three strongest leaves. Space the plants

1½ to 2 feet apart in the row. The runners are allowed to grow in all directions and fill the bed. A single plant can produce 30 to 50 runners in a season.

The depth at which strawberries are planted is critical. If the plant is set too deep, the crown will rot, too shallow and the roots will dry out. Set the plants so that the crown, which is the point where the leaves arise, is level with the ground surface. Spread the roots out to the sides when planting. If the roots are long, you may choose to trim them with a scissors or sharp knife.

One way to set strawberries at the correct depth is to dig wide holes and mound soil piles in the center of the hole. Adjust the height of the mound so that the plant crown is at the surface level. Spread the roots over the mound and refill the hole with soil. Hold the plant at the crown as you work, making sure it remains level with the soil line. Double check the planting depth when you finish. Once you have finished setting out all the plants, water each one with at least a pint of water a piece.

Strawberries are shallow-rooted and need one inch of water each week. Mulching around plants will help retain soil moisture and also combat weeds. June-bearing berries will not produce a crop until the summer following planting. If flowers appear, remove them by hand; this will direct all of the plant's energy to vegetative growth and not fruiting. The ever-bearing plants should produce a fair crop the first fall.

OSU Fact Sheet [HLA-6214 Growing Strawberries in the Home Garden](#) provides more information on strawberry production.

Dividing Perennials

David Hillock, Consumer Horticulturist

Perennials need dividing when their vigor is beginning to decline as expressed by smaller flowers, floppy stems, dead centers of the clump, a large number of underdeveloped shoots or when the lower foliage is sparse and poor. March is a good time to divide perennials that bloom in summer or fall; it is best to wait until late summer/fall to divide perennials that bloom in the spring. Select a time when they will be stressed the least, such as on a cloudy day, when soil is moist (not soggy), temperatures are cooler, and just before or as new growth begins to emerge. Root systems of these plants will have adequate energy stored up to help the new divisions recover from being split apart and replanted.

To divide crowded perennials gently dig them up using a garden fork, separate or divide the crowns making sure to include at least three to five healthy shoots. Discard small, weak, damaged or diseased portions; replant only the largest and healthiest divisions.

Home Lawn Irrigation: Operation Spring Preparation

Courtney Sidwell, Graduate Student and Justin Quetone Moss, Assistant Professor, Turfgrass

After last year, it seems we should prepare ourselves for battle this year. With last year being one of the worst years of recorded drought, no wonder we cringe at the thought of irrigation and its

problems associated with drought. Here are just a few tips to help you gear up for irrigation this spring.

1. Make sure your irrigation system is in good condition to avoid problems with it later in the year. This includes yearly calibration and simple observation for leaks and tears. If preferred, you can hire a professional to do this. More information on how to conduct an irrigation audit, or how to calibrate the irrigation system, can be found in the following fact sheet. ([HLA-6610](#))
2. Check warm-season grasses like Zoysia and Bermudagrass, to see that the thatch layer isn't more than ½-inch thick. Excessive thatch decreases water movement, which increases runoff and amount of water that's required for the turf to maintain health. It's easy to tell if the thatch layer is too thick if when you mow, there are areas that get scalped. You could also take a shovel and dig up a 3" sample to observe if the thatch layer is too thick.



Figure 1. Photo of cores taken from two bermudagrass turfs. Thatch is the brown layer of non-decomposed organic matter lying between the soil surface and the green shoots. Note the thick, excessive thatch layer in the core on the right. Thatch should not exceed 1/3 inch in thickness in cool-season grass lawns or 1/2 inch in warm-season grass lawns.

If the thatch layer is too thick, it would be wise to rent a lawn dethatcher and a core aerator from a farm supply store and use it on your lawn. A lawn dethatcher can help to break up the thatch layer in your lawn and a core aerator increases water, air, and nutrient movement within the soil and turf, creating a healthier turf with better disease resistance. The best time to do this is during the end of February or beginning of March.



Taking care of this will ensure better irrigation practices throughout the year. ([HLA-6604](#))

3. Get the soil tested during this time, while most plants are not growing, to find out what nutrients are needed for your lawn area. You will have to specify that you are growing a Bermudagrass lawn (or any other type of turfgrass you may have) when filling out the soil testing sheet and sending it to the laboratory. More information on this can be found in the following fact sheet. ([L-249](#)) When sufficient nutrients are available, plants are healthier, needing less water and other supplements to survive.
4. Remember that it is always better to water according to need, not by schedule. ([HLA-6420](#))
5. Water deeply and infrequently to encourage root growth. This is important when drought occurs and roots have to find water deep in the soil to keep the plant alive.
6. Mornings, before 10 a.m. are the best time to irrigate. Think of it as ‘eating your Wheaties®’ before the day starts. It equips the turf with everything it needs before the day occurs.

Following these irrigation tips will better arm you for the fight against drought this year, should it occur as badly as last year. Let’s hope it doesn’t, but it’s better to be safe than sorry!

Trees for Street Plantings and Urban Landscapes

David Hillock, Consumer Horticulturist

Selecting the right tree for a street planting or small urban landscape can be challenging. Not only do you need to find one that will literally “fit” the space provided, but there are other factors to consider. Tolerance to tight spaces, poor soils, drought, and pollution are just some of the characteristics trees need to survive many street and urban conditions. In addition, these trees should be structurally strong and not be messy by producing fruits or seeds or dropping twigs and bark. To avoid unwanted fruit a sterile variety should be selected or in the case where there are male and female trees (females produce the fruit) choose the male selection.

Also remember if there are power lines in the area, select trees that will not reach the power lines at maturity; this is usually a tree that will grow less than 20’ tall. Anything taller and the utility companies will come along and butcher the trees to keep them out of the lines. Of course, the best way to avoid this is to not plant anything under power lines.

The trees listed below have overall proven to be hardy, adaptable trees. However, not all the trees below will work for every situation so be sure to do a little more research to find the one that best fits your site. Today several of the species listed below have superior varieties available as well as

varieties that have narrow or columnar growth habits making them ideal for confined urban landscapes and street plantings.

Here are some possible species:

Bald Cypress, *Taxodium distichum* (Shawnee Brave® Bald Cypress, *Taxodium distichum* 'Mickelson')

Cedar Elm, *Ulmus crassifolia*

Chinese Pistache, *Pistacia chinensis*

Crapemyrtle, *Lagerstroemia* spp.

Ginkgo (male selection, slow growing)

Hedge Maple, *Acer campestre*

Hybrid Elms (Princeton, Valley Forge, New Harmony, etc.)

Hardy Rubber Tree, *Eucommia ulmoides*

Kentucky Coffeetree, *Gymnocladus dioica* (choose a male selection; gangly looking when young, but beautiful as it matures)

Silver Linden, *Tilia tomentosa*

Shantung Maple, *Acer truncatum*

Shumard Oak, *Quercus shumardii* (acorns could be a problem)

Trident Maple, *Acer buergerianum*

Zelkova, *Zelkova serrata*

As with any planting, site preparation is extremely important. Everything should be done to provide adequate root development. In the case of downtown street plantings, new technology is available to help improve growing conditions. For more information on planting trees see our fact sheet [HLA-6414 Planting Trees and Shrubs](#). For more information on new street tree planting technology, visit with a certified arborist or urban forester near you.

Leafy Greens and Onion Transplant Production Field Meeting

Jim Shreffler, Area Extension Horticulture Specialist, Lane

We invite everyone interested in learning about leafy greens crops and onion production to attend the Leafy Greens and Onion Transplant Production Field Meeting that will be held Thursday, March 8 at Lane, Oklahoma. This event will address leafy green production in hoop houses as well as the nutritional value and use of these vegetables. This is one of four locations of a project that is being conducted to explore the productivity of 9 different leafy greens crops in hoop houses. The meeting will also feature the production of onion transplants in hoop houses. Several years of research has shown this to be a viable means of producing high quality onion plants of desired cultivars that exhibit minimal risk of seedhead formation.

The program will begin with a tour of the leafy greens and onion projects in the high tunnels. We will then go indoors to hear presentations by Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Family and Consumer Sciences Educators on the nutritional and dietetic value of these vegetable crops and how they can be used in our diets. A noon meal will be served that will include some of the greens crops. The event will be held Thursday, March 8, 2012 from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. The meeting location

will be the Wes Watkins Agricultural Research and Extension Center which is located ten miles east of Atoka on Hwy 3.

In order to be sure we prepare enough meeting materials and food we MUST know in advance if you will attend. Please let us know who and how many will attend by sending an email to jim.shrefler@okstate.edu OR by calling call 580-513-5544. Please do so by March 5.

Specialty Crops Conference – A Demonstration Workshop

Jim Shrefler, Area Extension Horticulture Specialist, Lane

A two-day training program will be held this spring to address various aspects of growing specialty crops such as herbs and vegetables. The dates are April 12 and May 31, 2012. Because this program is designed to provide demonstration and hands on experience of various aspects of the production of specialty crops, dates were chosen to allow us to address production procedures in a timely fashion. The event will address various aspects of growing, irrigation, soil management, business and insurance considerations, pest management and food safety. Presenters will include professional horticulturists, Extension Educators and growers.

The site for the event will be the Oklahoma State University Wes Watkins Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Lane, Oklahoma. The Center is located 10 miles east of Atoka on Highway 3. Please sign up now to receive program details and registration information. To sign up you may send an email to jim.shrefler@okstate.edu or call 580-513-5544.

This event is sponsored by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Risk Management Agency and Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

2012 State Master Gardener Continuing Education Conference

David Hillock

This year the Payne County Master Gardeners are teaming up with The Botanic Garden at OSU Ambassadors to host the State Master Gardener Conference in Stillwater. The conference theme is *Red Dirt Gardening: A Window into the Future*. Our keynote speaker will be Allan Storjohann, Myriad Botanical Gardens. Allan will present “*Be a Smarter Gardener: Watch the Trends, Costs and Pitfalls of the Garden.*” The conference will also feature several breakout sessions.

The conference will begin Thursday, June 14 with an evening social at The Botanic Garden at OSU for those who want to come early. Regular conference activities will be at the Wes Watkins Center on the OSU campus Friday, June 15 with various garden tours that afternoon at The Botanic Garden.

Conferences are designed to help you better serve your community as a Master Gardener. We hope that you will mark your calendars and plan to attend. Planning and organization of the conference is still underway; we will keep you posted.

Upcoming Horticulture Events

IPM Conference

May 16, 2012 – Stillwater, OK

Plant Materials Conference

August 27-28, 2012

Wes Watkins Center – Stillwater, OK

GardenFest

September 29, 2012

The Botanic Gardens at OSU – Stillwater, OK

Tree Care Conference

October 3, 2012

Wes Watkins Center – Stillwater, OK

Global Horticulture Conference

November 7, 2012

Wes Watkins Center – Stillwater, OK

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