

Horticulture Tips

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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
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GARDEN TIPS FOR OCTOBER!

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Turfgrass

- You can continue to replant or establish cool-season lawns like fescue.
- The mowing height for fescue should be lowered to approximately 2½ 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 and 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 pawpaws 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 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 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.

Season Extenders

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To get the most out of a garden, you can extend the growing season by sheltering the plants from the cold weather in early spring and during fall. Very ambitious gardeners harvest greens and other cool-season crops all winter by providing the right conditions. There are many ways to lengthen the growing season; your choice depends on the amount of time and money you want to invest.

Coldframes and Hot Beds

Coldframes, sun boxes and hot beds are relatively inexpensive, simple structures that provide a favorable environment for growing cool-season crops in early spring, fall and even into winter months. Some are elaborate and require a large investment, but may be the best option for those who are serious about having fresh vegetables during winter.



Coldframes and sun boxes have no outside energy requirements, relying on the sun for their source of heat. Hot beds are heated by soil heating cables, steam-carrying pipes or fresh, straw-filled manure buried beneath the rooting zones of plants. Heat is collected by these frames when sunlight penetrates the sash made of clear plastic, glass or fiberglass.

To ensure good drainage and maximum solar absorption, the ideal location for a coldframe is a southern or southeastern exposure with a slight slope. A sheltered spot with a wall or hedge to the north will provide protection against winter winds. Sinking the frame slightly into the ground also provides protection by using the earth for insulation. A walkway in front of the frame, adequate space behind the frame to remove the sash and weights to raise and lower the glass sashes make using a frame easier. Some coldframes are lightweight enough to move between sections of the garden. Another possibility is the Dutch light, which is a large, portable, greenhouse-like structure that can be moved from place to place.

Passive solar energy storage is utilized in coldframe design. For example, barrels painted black and filled with water absorb heat during the day and release it at night. The solar pod provides this type of heat storage. Other coldframe designs are very well-insulated and have a high back and a steep glass slope. Some have movable insulation that is folded up during the day and folded down at night or during extremely cold weather to protect growing plants.



A coldframe is also useful in early spring to harden-off seedlings which were started indoors or in a greenhouse. This hardening-off period is important as seedlings can suffer serious setbacks if they are moved from the warmth and protection of the house directly to the garden. The coldframe provides a transition period for gradual adjustment to outdoor weather. It is also possible to start cool-weather crops in a coldframe, either transplanting them to the garden or letting them grow to maturity in the frame.

Fall is a good time to sow some cool-season crops in frames. With adequate moisture and fertilization, most cool-season crops will continue to grow through early winter in the coldframe's protected environment. Depending on the harshness of winter and whether additional heating is used, your frame may continue to provide fresh greens, herbs and root crops throughout cold winter months.

Growing frames can be built with a variety of materials, but wood and cinder blocks are the most common. Wooden frames are not difficult to build. Use decay-resistant wood, such as high quality cypress, or choose pressure-treated wood. Kits are commercially available and can be easily assembled; some kits even contain automatic ventilation equipment.

There is no standard size for a coldframe. Frame dimensions depend on the amount of available space, desired crops, the size of the window sash, and the permanency of the structure. Do not make the structure too wide for weeding and harvesting; 4 to 5 feet is about the maximum width to comfortably reach across. The frame sash should be sloped southward for maximum sunlight exposure and absorption.

Insulation may be necessary if a sudden cold snap is expected. A simple method is to throw burlap sacks filled with leaves over the frame sash at night to protect plants from freezing. Another method is to stack bales of straw or hay against the frame.

Ventilation is most critical from late fall through early spring on clear, sunny days when temperatures rise above 45° F. The sash should be partially raised to prevent the buildup of extreme temperatures inside the frame. Lower or replace the sash early enough to conserve some heat for evening.

It is possible to convert a coldframe to a hot bed. For a manure-heated bed, remove 2 feet of soil (for better drainage, remove more soil and add a layer of gravel). Add an 18-inch layer of straw-filled horse manure and then cover with 6 inches of good soil. For an electric-heated bed, remove

8 or 9 inches of soil. Place thermostatically-controlled electric cable in 6 to 8 inch loops on the soil, evenly spacing the cable but not allowing it to cross itself. Cover the cable with 2 inches of sand or soil, and then place hardware cloth on top to protect the cable. Finally, cover this with 4 to 6 inches of good soil.

Cloches and Row Covers

The cloche (pronounced klosch) was originally a bell-shaped glass jar set over delicate plants to protect them. However, many types of portable structures which shelter plants from drying winds and cold air are now defined as cloches.

Cloches provide a greenhouse-like atmosphere for seeds and small plants in order to get an early start on the season or to extend the fall garden as long as possible. They are either placed over individual plants or can be tunnel-shaped to cover whole rows. Cloches trap solar radiation and moisture evaporating from the soil and plants. Simple forms are a hotkap or plastic jugs cut in two pieces. More elaborate cloches include fiberglass tunnels, special plastic cloches or row covers with slits in them to provide aeration, as well as panes of glass connected by specially designed hinges to form a tent. There are a variety of forms on the market now, some more effective than others, and some can be easily constructed from house-hold materials.

Cloches are generally lightweight, portable and reusable. It is preferable to have a design that can be completely closed at night to prevent frost damage and opened or removed during the day for air circulation. Cloches should either be anchored down or be heavy enough to not blow away.



A Wall-o-Water is a product similar to a cloche.

Fall is a Good Time to Plant

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Now is an excellent time to plant most trees and shrubs as well as other landscape plants such as perennials and cool-season annuals. Cooler temperatures reduce stress to allow ideal root growth and establishment before cold weather. In fact, roots continue to grow as long as soil temperatures are above 40 degrees F. Plants installed during the growing season are susceptible to high transpiration rates leading to drying of plant tissues.

Research suggests that early fall planting is best for container-grown and B&B shade and ornamental trees and pines, but spring is best for planting bare-root plants and broadleaf evergreens, such as holly and Southern magnolia. However, many containerized plants can be planted any time if handled properly. Be sure to water regularly to keep roots and soil moist. A light mulch would also be in order around plants.

Planting pansies along with spring flowering bulbs will not only add to the spring display, but can provide a needed color during those cool, sometimes dreary fall and winter months. Pansies are extremely cold hardy and will tolerate snow and ice.

After properly preparing the bed area, pansy transplants can be set out at the recommended spacing with spring flowering bulbs scattered throughout. It won't matter too much if they are spaced close together because the spring bulbs will poke right up through the pansy foliage. This arrangement creates another dimension to the garden; the pansies form an "understory" of color, while the spring bulbs form an "upperstory" of color. Often times the colors of pansy and spring flowering bulbs provide striking complementary color combinations making the spring bed come alive.

Success for a cool-season annual planting is dependent on bed preparation and location. A sunny to partly shady location with excellent drainage is ideal and will encourage the most blooming. A heavily shaded spot will result in smaller, fewer flowers and may never dry out, which could result in root rots. On the other hand, do not let the plants become too dry. Cold, dry winter winds with little moisture in the form of rain or snow will result in winter scorch. Be sure to water the landscape enough to wet the soil to a depth of about 6 - 8 inches.

Additional cool-weather-loving annuals that can be planted this time of year are ornamental cabbage and kale, snapdragons, and others.

Young trees with green or tender bark should be wrapped by late October. Remember to start wrapping from the ground up to the first major limb.

Advantages of tree wraps for young plants:

- Deter animals from browsing on bark.
- Reflects sun that either scalds the trunks or makes them susceptible to southwest injury during the winter months (bark is warmed followed by a sudden plunge in temperature which kills that portion of the bark).

Do not apply any more fertilizer to trees or shrubs. By refraining from fertilizer applications, woody plants are able to harden off their latest growth to avoid freeze injury. Likewise, pruning should be discontinued at least until dormancy occurs. Otherwise, new succulent growth could be damaged as temperatures drop below freezing.