

Horticulture Tips

December 2015

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.

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 to 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 and magazine subscriptions.
- ❖ 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 extension 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!

- ❖ 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.

Christmas Trees

David Hillock

Today there are several options when it comes to choosing a Christmas tree including cut trees, potted or balled trees, and artificial trees. Cut, live trees are the most common type of Christmas tree. Three options are available to a person wanting a cut Christmas tree ---a pre-cut tree purchased from a dealer, a choose-and-cut tree purchased from a local grower or a wild-grown native Christmas tree.

Cut Trees – Great care needs to be taken in selecting a pre-cut tree. Most pre-cut Christmas trees sold in Oklahoma are grown in the Lake States and the Pacific Northwest and may have been cut as early as August. However, some trees are locally grown and thus will be fresher and less prone to drying out too quickly. As soon as a Christmas tree is cut it begins to dry. A tree that has dried will not recover when placed in water and is a fire hazard. Dry trees also tend to lose needles.

Follow these steps to be sure that the tree you are buying is fresh and of high quality.

1. Gently pull on the needles. They should be tightly attached to the twig.
2. Shake the tree vigorously or bounce the butt on the ground. If green needles fall, look further. Dead, brown needles falling from the inner part of the tree are older needles and are less of a problem.
3. Check to see that the tree has a fresh, green color. Some trees are sprayed with a blue-green dye. This dye is harmless, but be sure it's not hiding a dry tree. Some trees like scotch pine tend to be light green in color during colder weather, but will darken up once moved indoors.
4. Buy early before all the desirable trees have been sold.
5. Fir and pine trees hold needles better than spruce trees.
6. Break a few needles. They should be flexible and will feel moist or possibly sticky. They should also be fragrant when crushed.
7. Be sure limbs are strong enough to support lights and ornaments. Limbs should also be well placed to give the tree a pleasing shape. Minor defects can often be turned toward a wall, however, and can lower the purchase price.
8. Ask the dealer if the tree was locally grown. Local trees are much more likely to be fresh because they are cut nearer Christmas and aren't shipped long distances.

Choose-and-cut trees are available from Christmas tree growers throughout Oklahoma. Trees available from Oklahoma growers include Virginia pine, Scotch pine, eastern white pine, Austrian pine, ponderosa pine, white pine, Norway spruce, and concolor fir.

Each one offers a different experience, but one that is always a fun and memorable one for the family. Some of the farms offer more than just Christmas trees – wreaths, garland, table decorations and gifts may be available too. To make the experience more memorable some also offer free hot cider, hot chocolate, coloring books and candy canes as well as children's activities.

A free marketing directory produced by the Oklahoma Christmas Tree Association shows 15 different farms across the state in 2015. The 2015 marketing directory lists members of the Oklahoma Christmas Tree Association with trees for sale this holiday season. These Oklahoma grown trees are beautiful fresh green Christmas trees, which were carefully planted and nurtured for years specifically for you this Christmas.

For more information about Oklahoma Christmas trees go to www.okchristmastrees.com or contact your local Extension office.

Buy a choose-and-cut tree the way you would a pre-cut tree. Freshness and health are still the most important characteristics. The grower will usually have many trees marked for sale in various sizes. Some growers will cut the tree for you and others will expect you to cut your own.

Native trees can also be used as a Christmas tree. If you cut your own native Christmas tree, be sure you get the landowner's permission. Trespassing is illegal, even to cut what may be an unwanted tree.

Potted or Balled Trees – Some people buy a potted or balled Christmas tree with roots intact in the hope of having a new landscape tree come spring. This is very difficult to do successfully, but your chances of success increase if the tree is treated right.

1. Buy a healthy tree from a reputable nursery or grower. Expect to pay a higher price than for a typical Christmas tree.
2. Keep the tree in a shaded area or a non-heated garage until it is brought inside.
3. Keep the soil in the ball or pot moist until well after it is transplanted after Christmas. A frozen ball need not be watered if the crown is shaded and protected.
4. Lift and carry the tree by the ball or pot, not the top.
5. Keep the tree in the house no longer than about one week, five days or less is even better.
6. Have the tree's planting hole dug before the soil freezes and keep the fill dirt thawed. The planting hole and backfill can be protected from freezing by covering with plastic and then a thick layer of straw.

Artificial Trees – Artificial trees must be used carefully. Electric lights should not be used on metal trees because of the danger of electric shock. Light these trees with off-the-tree spotlights. Plastic trees may be fire resistant but the fumes they give off when burned are toxic.

Cut Tree Care – To insure a safe and happy holiday, you need to know a few things about caring for Christmas trees.

Once you have chosen a fresh Christmas tree, do your best to keep it fresh. A tree can stay fresh and healthy for several weeks if it is well cared for.

1. When you get the tree home, cut about an inch off of the butt end to aid in water absorption. Get the cut end into a container of plain water quickly. There is no need to add aspirin, sugar, or flame retardant to the water.
2. If the tree is not set up right away, store it in a protected, shady, unheated area. Cut the end and place the tree in a bucket of water.
3. When the tree is brought into the house, saw a slice of the butt again to insure water absorption.
4. Use a sturdy stand with a large water reservoir so it won't dry out. A fresh tree can use 1 quart or more of water a day, so water daily. A tree is beginning to dry out if its water use slows or stops.
5. Keep the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces, TV's, radiators, and air ducts. Never have open flames on or near a Christmas tree.

Decorating the Tree – Use only electric lights on your tree, never candles. Lights and cord should have the Underwriters Laboratories safety seal. Discard old damaged Christmas lights. New lights are relatively inexpensive, use less electricity, and stay cooler than old lights. Follow directions to determine how many strings to put on one circuit. Be sure to turn off the tree lights when no one will be in the room for any length of time.

Tree Disposal – Christmas trees can be useful even after they are taken down. Trees can be placed in the yard to add greenery and act as a bird haven until spring. Tie fruit peelings, popcorn or other favorite bird snacks to your tree for bird feed. Christmas trees can be used for firewood or chopped up and used as mulch. The branches can be cut off the tree and used as a mulch to protect landscape plants as well. Many communities have programs to gather trees after Christmas to be chipped for mulch or other uses. Trees can also be used to create a fish attractor by weighting the base of the tree and sinking it in a pond.

Poinsettia Care

David Hillock

Newer cultivars of poinsettia, in addition to being very showy, have excellent keeping quality and stronger stems than older cultivars. When buying your poinsettia, choose a plant with well-expanded, well-colored bracts. Foliage should be medium to dark green with uniform coloring. Flowers should be present in the center of the bracts.

1. After you purchase your plant, do not expose it to chilling temperatures or cold drafts of air. If the temperature outdoors is below 50°F do not carry an unwrapped plant from the retail shop to your car. In the home or other place of display, avoid cold drafts and excessive heat from heating ducts, TV sets, or large incandescent lamps. Temperatures of 70°F or below (down to 55°F) are desirable to retain best bract color. Large plants can be placed on the floor if light is adequate.
2. Light plays an important role in retention of leaves on the plant. Place the plant in an area where it receives at least six to eight hours of direct natural or artificial light. A minimum of 75 foot candles is desirable where possible. This would be similar to the minimum light intensity required for good desk lighting in an office. Incandescent lights such as those found in most homes will give a truer, brighter bract color than most types of fluorescent light.
3. Poinsettias can be displayed with other houseplants. The adjacent plants raise the humidity and allow poinsettias to last longer. Also, the regular houseplants can be spruced up for the holidays.
4. Many commercial growers use non-soil mixes of sphagnum peat, pine bark, vermiculite, perlite or similar ingredients. When plants are grown in such non-soil mixes, it is sometimes difficult to decide when the plant needs water. If there is no heavy component (sand or soil) in the mix and a plastic pot is used, the pot can be lifted to determine its weight. If the plant is heavy, there is usually plenty of moisture in the pot; if it is lightweight, the medium is dry and a thorough watering should be given. Moisture needs can also be assessed by feeling the growing medium in the pot. Water when the top of the growing medium is starting to feel dry, but do not allow too much drying. **Slight wilting** of the plant is not harmful, but **avoid severe wilting**, which will cause leaves to drop. Water the plant thoroughly. Make sure a small amount of water drips through the drainage holes of the container. If the plant is wrapped with decorative foil, punch a hole in the foil beneath the pot to allow excess water to escape. The plant should be placed on a saucer to prevent damage to the furniture or carpet. Do not water the plant too frequently when the soil or growing mix is already wet or this may result in roots suffocating from lack of oxygen, causing the leaves to wilt, yellow, and drop.

5. Recent research has shown that poinsettias are not poisonous, but the plants are intended solely for ornamental purposes. Some people are allergic to the milky sap and may develop a rash when exposed to the sap. Avoid breaking the leaves and stems, as this will release the sap. It is wise to keep any houseplant out of the reach of small children and pets.

Managing Storm Damaged Trees

David Hillock

Severe weather is a fact of life in Oklahoma, with storm-related damage a major impediment to maintaining healthy trees. Ice and wind have the power to snap limbs and large branches leaving landscapes littered with storm-damaged trees. While we cannot control the weather, we can implement measures to manage storm-damaged trees and minimize risk to people and personal property.

Rehabilitation or Removal – The decision to save or remove a storm-damaged tree is usually a subjective one, with the choice relying more on opinion than fact. Emotions often are the overriding factor in the decision process, especially when the damaged tree is a very large, old or ‘heirloom’ tree. Here are a few points to keep in mind when deciding whether to rehabilitate or remove your storm-damaged tree:

1. Use common sense and ask yourself if the damage has perhaps rendered this tree hazardous? In other words, does it now look vulnerable to any additional wind or ice event that could cause it to fall in its entirety or at least “drop” one or more large branches that could damage nearby property or prove fatal to people and pets?
2. Educate yourself as to the potential growth rate and commercial availability of replacement trees.
3. Even if the tree can be salvaged, assess whether it will ever look “right” again with some semblance of symmetry.
4. If significant bark has been ripped or loosened from the trunk, be realistic about the tree’s potential for attack from opportunistic microorganisms and damaging insects outlined later.

Choosing a Certified Arborist – Many storm-damaged trees are too large for property owners to rehabilitate or remove themselves. In these cases, a professional arborist should be consulted for the job. Hiring an arborist should be similar to hiring other professionals around the home such as plumbers, electricians, and carpenters. Do your homework, ask your friends and neighbors for recommendations. Additionally, be sure the individual you hire is certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Most reputable arborists will tout their ISA status in the yellow pages or other means of advertisement. Find certified arborists by going to this web site - <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx>. Finally, make sure the arborist you select is insured.

Safety – More than 50 fatalities nationwide are reported each year from professionals removing or pruning trees. Needless to say, the accident rate is much higher for people not trained in this specialized work. Consumers should be confident about the size and magnitude of the “job” to

avoid trees falling on them, electrocution or other catastrophic events. Even if a person is comfortable with heights, many other safety considerations come into play when pruning mature trees. Is appropriate equipment available? Is someone available to perform an aerial rescue if necessary (i.e., backup arborist)? Is there apparent risk to people or property from falling limbs? When in doubt, hire an ISA-certified arborist.

For additional information on caring for damaged trees see our fact sheet [EPP-7323 Managing Storm-Damaged Trees](#), or peruse the Forestry Section of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry's website, where additional information can be found about managing trees - <http://www.forestry.ok.gov/storm-damage-trees>.

Winter Irrigation

David Hillock

Don't forget to water your landscape plants during the winter months. It is not uncommon to have several weeks without precipitation during the winter, and though most plants are in a dormant state, they still use water, especially evergreens. If a cold front with freezing temperatures is forecasted, water the landscape at least a couple days in advance. Moist soil is better able to provide plant root protection from sudden drops in temperatures than dry soils. Water only when temperatures are well above freezing during the day and avoid overspray or runoff onto streets and sidewalks that could freeze at night and become a hazard to motorists and pedestrians.

Pay particular attention to plants in raised beds, plants in areas that are protected from precipitation such as under large overhangs, and broadleaf evergreen plants. During dry winters, broadleaf evergreens should be watered once a month.

Oklahoma State Pecan Show 2015

Becky Carroll

It's that time of year again! Remember to save back a couple of pounds of your best pecans to enter in the state show this year. Last year we made a few changes to the list of classes. We removed several classes that hadn't had any entries in the last several years such as Apache, Mahan, San Saba, Sioux and Success and added some that have had more entries but were only able to participate in the Other Cultivar class. The new classes are Oconee, Lakota, Waco, Nacono and Podsednik.

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. 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 Oklahoma State University, Department of Horticulture, Attn: Becky Carroll, 358 Ag Hall, OSU, Stillwater, OK 74078. Samples should arrive by January 22, 2016.

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 26 classes:

1. Barton	11. Mohawk	21. Waco
2. Burkett	12. Nacono	22. Western
3. Cheyenne	13. Oconee	23. Wichita
4. Choctaw	14. Pawnee	24. Other Cultivars
5. Comanche	15. Peruque	25. Large-Native (seedling) 60 nuts/lb or larger
6. Gratex	16. Podsednik	26. Small-Native (seedling) more than 60 nuts/lb
7. Kanza	17. Schley (eastern)	
8. Kiowa	18. Shoshoni	
9. Lakota	19. Squirrels Delight	
10. Maramec	20. 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 24 (Other Cultivars), Class 25 (Large-seedling) and Class 26 (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.

- Samples 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 22, 2016 at the following address:

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

Continuing Education/In-service Opportunity for Master Gardeners and County Educators

David Hillock

It is not too late to register for the Horticulture Industry Show (HIS) on January 8-9, 2016. HIS provides an opportunity to learn more about vegetables, fruits, sustainable agriculture, farmer's markets, landscape horticulture, Christmas trees, Master Gardener and Public Gardens, and Agritourism.

This year HIS will be held at the Tulsa Community College NE Campus, 3727 E Apache, Tulsa, OK. All Master Gardeners and County Educators are invited to attend. If you are a returning Master Gardener you can receive continuing education hours that will count towards the minimum 20 hours you need to keep active member status. If you are a County Educator you can receive in-service hours by attending.

Register today by going to the conference web site <http://www.hortla.okstate.edu/events/HIS/>. Registration before December 22 is \$55 for the two-day conference or \$42 for one day. After December 22 registration goes up to \$85 for two days and \$60 for one day so don't delay and register before December 22.

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