



HORTICULTURE TIPS



Division of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources * Oklahoma State University

JANUARY 2014

GARDEN TIPS FOR DECEMBER/JANUARY!

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 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, magazine subscriptions or membership to The Botanic Garden at Oklahoma State University (<http://www.botanicgarden.okstate.edu/>).
- ❖ 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. ([HLA-6421](#))

Winterizing Your Irrigation System

Malarie Gotcher, Extension Associate and Justin Quetone Moss, Assistant Professor

Preparing your lawn irrigation system for the winter prolongs system life and can potentially reduce maintenance costs in the spring. Water left in the pipes can freeze and may cause damage to irrigation system components. There are different methods for draining excess water depending on what type of sprinkler system you have. The main methods for winterizing irrigation systems are manual drain, automatic drain or the blow-out method. If you are unsure or don't feel comfortable winterizing your system, consult with a landscape professional.

Manual Valves – If your system is equipped with a manual drainage valve, shut off the supply of water to the system. Open all of the valves at the ends of the piping. Allow the water to drain from the system. After the water has drained out, open the drain cap on the stop and waste valve to remove the remaining water between the shut off valve and backflow device. If your sprinklers have check valves you should pull up on the sprinklers to let the water drain out of the sprinkler body.

Automatic Valves – This method can be used when automatic drain valves are at the end and lowest point of the irrigation piping. The valves will automatically open and drain water when the pressure falls below 10 PSI. Activate the automatic valves by turning off the water supply and running one zone. After the water has drained out, open the drain cap on the stop and waste valve to remove the remaining water between the shut off valve and backflow device. If your sprinklers have check valves you should pull up on the sprinklers to let the water drain out of the sprinkler body

Blow-out Method – The blow-out method should be used if you're unsure of your system type. Be very careful, stand away from irrigation components and wear eye protection when blowing out an irrigation system. You'll need an air compressor with a cubic foot per minute rating of 80 to 100 for a mainline of 2 inches or less. First, shut off the water supply and attach the compressor to the mainline. Do not blow compressed air through a backflow device or flow sensors. To start, activate the station on the controller that has the zone of highest elevation and is furthest from the compressor. Slowly open the valve on the compressor and make sure it is below the lowest pressure rated component for each zone. Work your way to the closest zone using short cycles per zone until no water can be seen from the sprinkler heads. A professional contractor should be consulted if you're hesitant to perform this method.

There may be times when lawns need irrigation water during the winter. If there is a prolonged period with no precipitation, the soil and plants may become dry. Adequate soil moisture is important for survival of turfgrass plants during the winter and green up the following spring. If it is necessary to water during the winter, choose a relatively warm day or period during the winter, turn the system back on, irrigate the lawn, then repeat the winterization process before freezing temperatures return.

Winter Irrigation Tips

- Disconnect, drain and store garden hoses.
- Winterize rain barrels by draining water and storing if possible.
- Watering newly planted landscapes plants may be needed during dry winter months. Use a garden or soaker hose when necessary. Make sure to re-drain and store if freezing temperatures are in the forecast.
- Turn irrigation system controllers to the "OFF" position.

Sharpen That Blade Now!

David Hillock

As mowers are put away for the season, one of the more important maintenance practices suggested is to sharpen that blade! Studies have shown that some of the problems we have with weakened lawns may not be due to environmental stresses, but can be directly linked with failure to keep the mower blade sharp. A dull mower blade rips the grass, instead of cutting it cleanly. The ripping action makes a long, slow healing wound that makes disease invasion more pervasive. It can also lead to extensive tip dieback of the grass blade itself that reduces the effective photosynthetic area left to the grass following a cut.

Mower blades should be sharpened on a regular basis, and there is no better time to do it than as that mower is stored for the winter. This insures that the first cut is a good "sharp" one!

Poinsettia Care

David Hillock

The poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima Willd.*) is the traditional Christmas plant. It is native to Mexico and was introduced to the United States by Joel Poinsett, the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. In mild climates such as Florida and California the poinsettia is also grown in the landscape, but is not winter-hardy in Oklahoma.

The striking beauty of the poinsettia is found in the showy bracts, which are specialized leaves, surrounding the true yellow flowers. Plants with red bracts are most popular, but plants with yellow, pink, white and variegated bracts are also available.

The 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, television 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.

Deicing Effects 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.

2013 Tomato Trial Results

Lynn Brandenberger, Extension Horticulture Food Crops Specialist

Tomatoes have been produced in Oklahoma since people began gardening here. Oklahomans want locally grown fresh produce and tomato is one of those must have items for all of us. Within the vegetable crop group, tomatoes require high levels of management and attention to detail in order to be successful. One of the biggest problems for tomato growers is fruit set which usually stops completely during the hotter periods of June and July. In 2011 and 2012, farmers had difficulty growing tomatoes for market due to the intensely hot weather that was experienced. Farmers continue to request help with this ongoing problem. The objective of these trials was to trial tomato varieties for heat-set capabilities and use plasticulture to manage soil temperature and moisture levels to decide if gains can be made in tomato yield during the hot months of summer.

During 2013 five different tomato grower trials were completed around the state. A majority of the trials had the same 12 varieties and locations varied from west-central to eastern areas of the state. Each trial's results have been written and will be available in the 2013 Vegetable Trial Report MP-164. The trial report will be available on-line sometime in December at <http://www.hortla.okstate.edu/industry/vegetables/index.htm>.

Trial results will also be presented at the 2014 Horticulture Industry Show (HIS) Friday, January 10, 2014. At HIS printed copies of the Vegetable Trial Report will be available while supplies last. Stay tuned for more specific information on the 2013 trials.

New Publication

David Hillock

L-440 Tree Planting Guide – This leaflet is a simple, front and back publication that discusses the proper way to plant and take care of new trees. A list of recommended trees for Oklahoma is also included.

2014 Southeast Oklahoma Turf & Landscape Maintenance Training Program

Jim Shrefler

The 2014 Turf & Landscape Maintenance Training Program is scheduled for January 16, 2014. The event will be held at the Pontotoc Technology Center in Ada, Oklahoma. This event is being planned to provide training that will benefit those such as Turf Managers, Groundskeepers, Sports Field Managers, Community Outdoor Maintenance workers and Commercial Landscapers. The topics that will

be addressed are selected to address current technology trends, common management issues and other topics that will enable turf and landscape managers to improve their management skills. Presentations will address areas such as weed and pest management, nutrient management, climate and weather outlook and resources, irrigation management and tree planting and care.

Speakers will include specialists from Oklahoma State University and the Oklahoma Climatological Survey. The meeting format includes general session presentations in the morning. Following an on-site lunch, afternoon concurrent talks will allow attendees to choose topics based on their interests. For more information, call the Pontotoc County Extension Center at 580-332-2153. Pesticide applicator CEU will be provided. The agenda will be posted at <http://www.oces.okstate.edu/searea/Horticulture> and registration details will be available soon.

2014 Grape and Pecan Management Courses Available

Becky Carroll

Brochures are now available detailing the 2014 Grape and Pecan Management Courses. Both courses offer an opportunity for potential new or veteran growers to learn or refresh their basic management skills needed to successfully grow each crop. The classes meet one afternoon a month beginning in February (Grape) and March (Pecan) and continuing for the growing season. Having the classes through the season gives participants the chance to see what management requirements are necessary at specific times. Students learn in both the classroom and in the vineyard or orchard setting. The classes meet at the Cimarron Valley Research Station near Perkins. Classes also travel to a couple of established orchards or vineyards/wineries to learn from other growers.

The cost for enrollment in either course is \$250 per student. Pecan course members are also eligible to use the online pecan management course for no charge. Registration for the grape course is due by February 14 and the pecan course by February 28. For registration information, visit <http://www.hortla.okstate.edu/>.

The courses not only can help growers learn but are a great opportunity for County Extension Educators to hone their skills with these crops. Educators can take the course at no cost. The online Pecan Management Course is also available to county educators who would like to learn more about pecans. The online pecan class is located at <http://pecan.okstate.edu/>. For more information about the contents of the class, please contact Becky Carroll at becky.carroll@okstate.edu or 405-744-6139.

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