



# HORTICULTURE TIPS



Division of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources \* Oklahoma State University

November 2017

## GARDEN TIPS FOR NOVEMBER!

*David Hillock*

### Lawn & Turf

- Fertilize cool-season grasses like fescue with 1 pound nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft.
- Continue to mow fescue as needed at 2 inches and water during dry conditions.
- Control broadleaf winter weeds like dandelions ([HLA-6601](#)).
- Keep falling leaves off fescue to avoid damage to the foliage.

### Tree & Shrub

- Prune deciduous trees in early part of winter. Prune only for structural and safety purposes.
- Wrap young, thin-barked trees with a commercial protective material to prevent winter sunscald.
- Apply dormant oil for scale infested trees and shrubs before temperatures fall below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Follow label directions.
- Continue to plant balled and burlapped and containerized trees.
- Watch for arborvitae aphids, which tolerate cooler temperatures in evergreen shrubs.

### Flowers

- Tulips can still be successfully planted through the middle of November.
- Leave foliage on asparagus, mums, and other perennials to help insulate crowns from harsh winter conditions.
- Bulbs like hyacinth, narcissus and tulip can be potted in containers for indoor forcing.

### Fruits & Nuts

- Delay pruning fruit trees until next February or March before bud break.
- Harvest pecans and walnuts immediately to eliminate deterioration of the kernel.

### Miscellaneous

- Leftover garden seeds can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator or freezer until next planting season. Discard seeds over 3 years old.
- Gather and shred leaves. Add to compost, use as mulch or till into garden plots.
- Clean and store garden and landscape tools. Coat with a light application of oil to prevent rusting. Drain fuel tanks, irrigation lines, and hoses. Bring hoses indoors.

## **I Didn't Know Ornamental Sweet Potatoes Developed Sweet Potatoes! Are They Edible?**

*David Hillock*

Many gardeners are surprised to see fairly large tubers appearing on their ornamental sweet potatoes late in the season. In fact, if left in the small pots that they were purchased in, the tubers may burst the sides of the pots

wide open by the end of the growing season. They are not noticeable early in the year, I believe, because most plants sold in garden centers are started from rooted cuttings. The tubers don't develop until they have been growing in our nice warm summer soils.

Of course the next question is, "Are they edible?" Well, yes, they are a true sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), selected for their ornamental value, but edible tubers are produced. I have not actually tasted one myself, but I have heard from some gardeners that they can be quite tasty, while others say they lack the qualities of edible types. Just remember though, as with any potato, don't eat green potato tubers raw. When tubers are exposed to light they turn green and become inedible.

Ornamental sweet potatoes are grown for their decorative foliage and vigorous growing habit. They work well as groundcover in the landscape or as a container grown plant. Grown along a retaining wall, raised bed or in a container, they spill nicely over the edge creating a soft flowing look. Several cultivars are available including 'Blackie' with dark purple almost black leaves, 'Margarita' with chartreuse or lemon lime colored leaves (also an Oklahoma Proven Plant), and 'Tricolor' or 'Pink Frost' with variegations of pink, white and green.

## **Protecting Young Trees**

*David Hillock*

Trunks of some newly planted trees, especially those with green trunks or thin-bark, require protection from direct sunlight during all seasons. They are especially susceptible to sunscald (blistering and cracking of the bark) during winter months when leaves are absent. Protect the trunk with a commercial tree wrap such as a polyurethane spiral wrap or paper (kraft) wrap. The wrap should be applied in the fall, but should be removed prior to trunk expansion each spring.

The most commonly reported damage from trunk protective wraps is trunk girdling or constriction because the wrap was too tight or left on too long. Generally, a tree will only need to be wrapped the first season or two after planting.

Tie the wrap firmly, but not tightly. Polyurethane wraps expand without binding the trunk. Start at the ground and wrap up to the first branch slightly overlapping as you go. Do not attach wraps with wire, nylon rope, plastic ties, or electrical tape.

Plants prone to winter desiccation, such as broadleaf evergreens, when planted in open windy areas may require additional protection. Temporary protective barriers such as sheets of burlap, lathe fencing, bales of hay etc. can be constructed to provide protection from the drying winds. Unfortunately, anti-desiccants generally do not relieve plant stress in Oklahoma in winter or summer.

Protect young trees and shrubs from animal damage. Polyurethane wrap, wire mesh collars or rodent repellent paint can be used. Holly, honey locust, elm, and fruit trees are particularly susceptible. Remember snow will change the height of the bite.

For more information on protecting landscape plants during the winter see OSU Fact Sheet [HLA-6404 Winter Protection for Landscape Plants](#).

# Controlling Deer Damage

*David Hillock*

Oklahoma's white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) population has increased from 40,000 to more than 250,000 since the 1960s. As the deer population expanded, deer moved into peripheral suburban areas. Increasingly, homeowners at the rural/urban interface must deal with damage to ornamental and garden plants. As deer begin moving into an area, homeowners initially enjoy seeing them and may actually encourage deer to come into their yard by feeding them. Rural subdivisions may ban hunting or place restrictions on firearm use to protect their deer or for safety reasons. Homeowner attitudes begin changing after deer numbers increase to the extent that shrubbery shows heavy browsing and gardens become difficult to grow because of continued depredation. In addition to browsing, damage may occur in the fall when bucks begin rubbing antlers on small trees or young nursery stock.

Commonly Used Control Methods – The problem of damage control is not an easy one to solve. Trapping and moving excess deer is often suggested by homeowners as a humane alternative to hunting with guns or even limited hunting with archery tackle. However, the cost to move enough deer to lower damage to tolerable levels is definitely prohibitive. It should be recognized that most areas of Oklahoma are well populated with deer. Any deer moved to another area will only shorten food supplies for both resident and transplanted animals. Nature will then control the excess through starvation or decreased reproductive success because of chronic malnutrition. At best, trapping and relocating problem deer is only a short term solution.

Deer damage control methods fit into six categories:

1. exclusion—by electric fence or eight-foot high, deer-proof fence
2. scare or frightening tactics—with tethered dogs, gas exploders, fireworks or discharging firearms
3. habitat modification
4. population reduction through sport hunting
5. repellents—area repellents repel by smell and contact repellents repel by taste
6. alternative plantings

Control methods other than an eight-foot high, deer-proof fence or an electric fence reduce damage by 50 to 75 percent at best, and often much less. A deer-proof fence does not fit well with most landscaping plans and can be expensive if large areas are to be protected. For small gardens, a deer-proof fence can be cost effective. For best results they should be constructed before serious damage occurs.

Scare tactics work for only short periods of time, but may be useful by providing enough protection to allow the crop to be harvested. Habitat modification is expensive and may actually attract deer if misapplied. A professional wildlife biologist should be consulted if this is the desired course of action. Population reduction by sport hunting is the most cost effective, long-term solution and should be seriously considered if damage is wide spread.

Repellents which provide an unpleasant taste or odor can be used, but damage will not be entirely eliminated. Effectiveness will vary with deer density, season, and availability of alternate foods. To be effective, repellents must be applied before deer begin actively browsing in the affected area. Area repellents are generally less effective than contact repellents. Research results on the relative effectiveness of area and contact repellents from several sources can be found in OSU fact sheet [HLA-6427 Ornamental and Garden Plants: Controlling Deer Damage](#). Bear in mind that repellents will not completely eliminate damage and that a given method's

effectiveness will change seasonally, based on what natural foods are available to deer. Many repellents do not weather well and will need to be reapplied after a rain.

To see a list of plant material that may or may not be affected by deer or for more information on control see fact sheet [HLA-6427 Ornamental and Garden Plants: Controlling Deer Damage](#).

## **Controlling Insects In and Around the Home**

*David Hillock*

The first important step in the process of insect control is to identify the insect that is present so that the proper control procedure will be used. OSU county extension educators, area and state extension specialists in Entomology, and pesticide dealers can help identify the pest for the homeowner, or the pest may be sent to the OSU Entomology Department for identification.

The homeowner can usually control light infestations of pests in the house by carefully following directions on the pesticide container and by doing a thorough job of application. Sanitation and good housekeeping are possibly the most important aspects in controlling or preventing pests, but even well-kept homes sometimes become infested.

Certain pests found outside may be eliminated before they enter the home. (For information on control of pests outdoors, refer to OSU Extension Fact Sheet [EPP-7306 Ornamental and Lawn Pest Control](#)). However, some insects live entirely within the home, where they must be controlled by applying spray, dust, bait, or aerosol pesticides to areas where they are most frequently found. If the infestation is severe and widespread, it is advisable to employ the services of a pest control firm, which has pesticides and application equipment not generally available to homeowners.

For more information on pesticides and their use in and around the home see [EPP-7312 Household Pest Control](#).

### Safety Tips

- Read and follow all directions on the container label.
- Avoid repeated or prolonged contact of insecticides with the skin and prolonged inhalation of spray mist.
- Do not spray oil solutions near an open flame (pilot lights).
- Do not risk contaminating food by treating near food, dishes or cooking and eating utensils.
- Dispose of empty pesticide containers, and do not puncture or incinerate aerosol or pressurized spray cans.
- Store insecticides in the labeled original containers, in a dry place where they cannot contaminate foodstuffs and where children and pets do not have access to them.
- After using pesticides, always wash your hands and face and any other exposed body areas.
- For further information on handling, mixing, and applying pesticides, consult your area or state extension entomologists, visit your local county extension educator, and/or refer to OSU Extension Fact Sheet [EPP-7450 Safe Use of Pesticides in the Home and Garden](#) for information on safe use of pesticides.

Prevention and Control Hints – Before applying insecticides for pest control, the homeowner can help insure better control by doing the following:

1. Clean out areas that make good homes for the pest.
2. Clean up areas that collect grease, food scraps or other spillage which might provide a food source.
3. Eliminate excessive storage boxes from the attic and garage, and clean up foliage or other hiding places from around the outside foundation of the house.
4. If grain or flour pests are present, locate the infested material. Go through all cereal boxes, flour, beans, dry pet food, and spice containers until the infestation source is located. Dispose of the infested material, then a light application of pesticide
5. Carefully check newly purchased dried foods for insect infestations, and store foods in tightly sealed glass, plastic or metal containers rather than in sacks, bags or boxes.

**NOTE:** on ultrasonic electronic or sound control devices: To date, these devices have not been proven to be effective or practical.



The *Horticulture Tips* newsletter distributed monthly (except January) by the following:

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
 707 West Electric Avenue  
 McAlester, OK 74501  
 918-423-4120      [www.oces.okstate.edu/pittsburg](http://www.oces.okstate.edu/pittsburg)

This newsletter is one way of communicating horticultural information to those interested.

**DAVID CANTRELL**  
 Extension Educator, Agriculture  
[david.cantrell@okstate.edu](mailto:david.cantrell@okstate.edu)

PREPARED BY:      Stephanie Wilson  
                                  stephanie.wilson12@okstate.edu

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