

## Pottawatomie County Horticulture Newsletter



# Starting Tender Perennials Indoors

Dahlias, tuberous begonias, and other tender perennials are attractive plants for the home landscape. The "bulbs" (actually tubers, rhizomes, and other structures) of tender perennials are usually planted directly outdoors in spring. However, these attractive ornamentals can be enjoyed for longer periods by starting them indoors in late winter.

### ***Tuberous Begonia***

Plant tubers indoors about 8 weeks before the average last spring frost in your area. When planting the tubers, place the concave or indented side upward. The rounded side is the bottom. Cover the tubers with 1/2 to 1 inch of potting soil. Water well. Then place the containers in a warm, 70°F location. Since the tubers are susceptible to rotting, keep the potting mix moist, but not wet.

### ***Caladium***

Plant caladium tubers indoors 4 to 6 weeks before the average last frost date in your area. Tubers should be planted 1 to 2 inches deep. When planting the tubers, place the knobby side up. The knobs are the tuber's eyes or buds. After planting, place the containers in a warm, 75 to 80°F location to facilitate sprouting.

### ***Canna***

Start canna rhizomes indoors 4 to 6 weeks before the average last frost date in your area. Plant the cannas in large pots. The rhizomes should be covered with 3 to 4 inches of potting soil.

### ***Dahlia***

Plant dahlias indoors 6 to 8 weeks before the intended outdoor planting date. Pot up the dahlia tubers in large pots using a well-drained potting mix. Cover the tuber with 1 inch of soil, but leave the dahlia's crown exposed at the surface of the potting mix. Dahlia tubers are susceptible to rotting. Keep the potting mix moist, but not wet.

### ***Elephant's Ear***

Start elephant's ear indoors 6 to 8 weeks before the average last frost date in your area. Plant the tubers 1 to 2 inches deep. Foliage may not appear for several weeks as elephant's ear tubers are often slow to sprout.

### ***Calla Lily***

Plant calla lily rhizomes 1 to 2 inches deep in a well-drained potting mix about 6 to 8 weeks before the average last spring frost in your area. After potting, water well and place the containers in a warm, 70 to 75°F location. Keep the potting mix moist, but not wet.

When foliage appears, move the plants to a sunny window or place them under fluorescent lights. Before planting outdoors, harden or acclimate the tender perennials to outdoor growing conditions. Initially, place the plants in a shady, protected location and then gradually expose them to longer periods of sunlight. After they have been hardened, plant the tender perennials in their proper location.



### **Inside this issue:**

<b>Late Winter Recommended for Pruning Chores</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Soil Sample Time</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Gardening/Fruit Tree Seminar Set</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Home &amp; Garden Show</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Master Gardener Assoc.</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Treated Lumber &amp; Alternatives in the Garden</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Bugs Trying to Overwinter in the Home</b>	<b>4</b>

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## Late Winter Recommended for Pruning Chores

If you're itching to get outdoors and work on your garden, now is a good time to survey your landscape and decide what needs pruning. But keep in mind that not all plants need to be trimmed.

Landscape plants should be pruned to maintain or reduce their size; to remove undesirable growth; to remove dead or damaged branches; and to rejuvenate older plants to produce more vigorous foliage, flowers and fruits. In some cases, pruning is necessary to prevent damage to life and property.

Pruning isn't as difficult as most people think, but there are proper techniques to keep in mind. Late winter or early spring (before new growth begins) generally is considered to be the optimum time to prune most plants. This is when plants' wounds heal quickly without threat of insect or disease infection. However, plants that bloom in early spring, such as forsythia, magnolia and crabapples, should be pruned later in spring after their blooms

fade. These early bloomers produce their flower buds on last year's wood, so pruning early will remove many potential blooms. Trees that have large quantities of sap in the spring such as maple, birch and dogwood are not harmed by early spring pruning but can be pruned in mid-summer or late fall to avoid the sap bleeding.

It's best to allow a tree or shrub to develop its natural shape as much as possible. However, removing selected branches because they are weak or formed at a poor angle to the trunk will help the rest of plant receive more sunlight. Thin this type of growth by removing unwanted branches at their point of origin. Leave a very small stub of about one-half to 2 inches, depending on the age of the branch, to avoid injury to the main branch or trunk.

If reduction in size is desired, a technique called heading back is recommended. Shorten branches by cutting back to a healthy side bud or branch that is pointing in the direction you want future growth to occur. Make your cut about one-

fourth inch above the bud or branch.

Evergreen trees such as firs, pines and spruce are not pruned by the same methods as other plants. They can be encouraged to produce stockier trees by pinching the "candles" of new growth that emerge in late spring. Pinch out one-half of the candle when it reaches approximately 2 inches long. Use a sharp knife or your fingers to pinch instead of a shears, which can damage the needles surrounding the candle.

Whatever the tree or shrub, remember that topping or haircut trimming are not sound pruning practices. Topping results in numerous, fast-growing new shoots, which are much weaker and more susceptible to wood rots than the original growth, and are more likely to cause damage to property and power lines. Use the heading-back technique to reduce the plant's height. This technique may be more costly in time or money, but the results are worth the extra effort.

## Now is the Time to Take That Needed Soil Sample

It's time to soil sample your lawns, gardens and other areas that you want to grow well. Healthy, well grown plants can withstand a considerable amount of insect and disease pressure. Proper fertilization also enhances quality and colors of plants. It also increases yield in the case of vegetables.

If you haven't soil sampled in the last 2-3 years, I would recommend it. Before you say I just have a small garden or lawn and I don't need to fertilize, let me relate what I see. A full 50% or more of homeowners soil sample results come back needing NO fertilizer. To be truthful, most homeowners have fertilized to the point of far too many nutrients having been applied and this is as bad for the plants as not enough fertilizer.

Go to a number of locations in the area you want to test and get cores, 6"-8" deep at each spot. Mix them together and bring us a pint jar full. The cost is \$10. It takes a couple of weeks or so to get the results back. I will make a recommendation of what fertilizers can be used to satisfy needs. The longer you wait, the busier the lab gets and we might have a hard time getting back your results in a timely fashion.

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## Gardening and Fruit Tree Seminar Scheduled

The OSU Extension Center will host a **Gardening and Fruit Tree Seminar** on **Monday, February 9, beginning at 6:30 p.m.** We will meet at our office, **14001 Acme Road, Shawnee.**



With hopefully warm weather around the corner, gardeners will start to think about these popular plantings. Discussion will center around fertilization, watering, proper placement, disease and insect control and other production practices associated with vegetable and fruit trees.

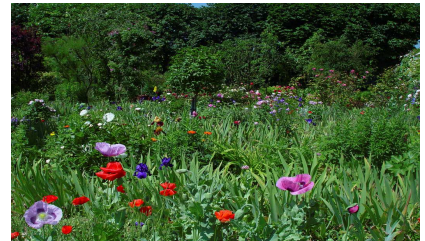
It's free and open to anyone interested. **See you on the 9th!**

## HOME AND GARDEN SHOW COMING IN FEBRUARY

The Shawnee Home and Garden Show is scheduled for **February 27-29**. It is free this year and will again include an excellent trade show and presentations.

This year's presentations will include a seminar by Kim Rebek, Host of Oklahoma Gardening.

Watch the newspaper for more specifics.



## Master Gardener Association

To those that have been through the Master Gardener class, the Association would like to encourage you to become active and join them the third Wednesday of each month. They meet monthly at the Extension Office beginning at 9:30 a.m. They conduct business, have tours and educational meetings while planning educational projects. If you haven't been in a while, come again and see what you are missing.

## Treated Lumber and Alternatives in the Garden

Gardening in raised beds can be just the answer for would-be gardeners, who would love to grow their own vegetables and flowers, but lack the space or physical ability for a traditional garden. However, recent controversy regarding chemical wood preservation treatments has left many gardeners wondering about the safety of treated lumber.

Many gardeners have made use of treated lumber in their raised beds, fences, benches, gazebos and other landscape structures. Up until about 2003, many of us used a then commonly available treated lumber product called chromated copper arsenate (CCA). But in 2002, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that CCA treated lumber would be phased out for use in consumer/residential products over the following couple of years due to concerns regarding the safety of arsenic. Since then, several more environmentally friendly alternatives to CCA treatments have become available, although existing stockpiles of CCA treated lumber can still be used.

Alkaline copper quaternary (ACQ) is a water-based fungicide/insecticide combination that is higher in copper than CCA but is free of arsenic. This type of treated lumber can be used for above-ground structures, as well as those underwater. ACQ treated wood can be painted or stained and is available at many lumber suppliers.

Copper Azole is another combination fungicide/insecticide treatment, but this type of treated lumber can only be used in above-ground structures (no underwater usage). It, too, can be painted or stained.

There are alternatives to treated lumber, including synthetic composites made from recycled plastic or rubber, vinyl fencing and naturally rot-resistant woods, such as cedar and redwood. Other materials, such as stone, concrete block and brick, provide alternatives to wood.

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## What to Do with Beetles and Other 'Bugs' Trying to Overwinter in the Home

During the winter months, certain species of beetles may invade the home in high numbers. The two most likely would be the ladybird 'ladybug' beetle and the box elder bug. While the presence of dozens and up to hundreds of these insects gathering in corners can be disconcerting, they will not do any harm. Both are looking for a warm place to overwinter. While insecticides like a synthetic pyrethrin can be used to kill the insects, they can be removed quite easily with a vacuum cleaner. As the ladybird beetle is a beneficial insect that feeds on insect pests during the growing season, it is best if they can be collected alive and moved to a sheltered place outside. To remove the insects, simply vacuum them up in a vacuum that can be emptied without the use of a bag and move them to an out building, under a pile of leaves or dump them in a sheltered place next to a wood pile. The same can be done with the box elder bug, but they are not a predator of other insects in the adult stage. Other arthropods that invade the home like spiders, centipedes, millipedes, scorpions and sow bugs (roly polys) can be controlled with an insecticide spray. The best way to prevent their entering the house is to seal cracks around baseboards, windows, doors and other cracks around plumbing or wires. Foam caulk can be used around larger openings, while small cracks can be sealed with other caulking. Doors can be sealed by attaching sealing strips to all edges of the door, including the top of the door. If they still get in the house, then the outside of the home should be sealed as well and a barrier application of insecticide can be sprayed around the base of the outside of the home.

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