

# Horticulture Tips

## November 2018

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources  
Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture  
Oklahoma State University

### **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.

#### 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.

#### 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.

## **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, antidesiccants 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, honeylocust, 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 of Landscape Plants.

## **Protecting Spring Bulbs from Squirrels and Other Critters**

*David Hillock*

Squirrels and rodents cannot resist digging their teeth into the juicy bulbs we so conveniently place in the ground for them each fall. Though our intention is not to feed wildlife, this is the ultimate fate of many flower bulbs. An easy trick can help protect bulbs over the winter to ensure abundant spring blooms. The tool of choice is hardware cloth with ½-inch openings.

To make use of this trick, dig out a small planting bed, rather than plant each bulb individually. Remember that proper planting depth is important. The general rule is to plant bulbs at a depth equal to 3 times their height. Your mulch layer should be included in the final depth of your bulbs.

Dig a bed a few inches wider on all sides than the intended bulb planting and set the bulbs. Remember to place them with the growing tip pointing up. Once all the bulbs are set, begin filling the bed with soil until the bulbs are covered, but do not completely fill the planting bed.

Stop adding soil an inch or two below grade. Place the hardware cloth over the planting area, securing the edges in the soil with stakes. Finish filling the planting area with soil and mulch. The wire will prevent animals from digging up your bulbs, but the openings are wide enough to allow the foliage and flower stalks of the bulbs to move freely through.

If your bulb problems are caused by burrowing rodents such as gophers, you may need to line the bottom of the area with hardware cloth too. Another trick is to construct small boxes or baskets out of hardware cloth and place the bulbs inside. Then plant the entire cage in the ground. This method is also useful if you are trying to squeeze bulbs in among perennials and don't have room to dig a larger planting bed.

Deer find tulips to be a delicacy; once tulips emerge in spring, keep new growth sprayed with repellents, or where feasible use a fence around the area. Fences need to be at least 8 feet high to keep deer out.

Critters do not find all bulbs to be delicious and even avoid some. Consider planting a less favored bulb in the landscape, such as daffodils, muscari, hyacinth, scilla or fritillaria.

## **Forcing Bulbs for the Holidays**

*David Hillock*

We have been busy planting bulbs in the gardens, but we do not have to wait until spring to enjoy these blossoms. Many spring-flowering bulbs can be forced indoors for a colorful winter display. What better way to brighten up a winter day than with fresh flowers.

"Forcing" is the term used to describe the process that stimulates bulbs to bloom out of season. The easiest bulbs to force are Paperwhite Narcissus because they don't require chilling. Other commonly forced bulbs include amaryllis, muscari and hyacinths. More challenging bulbs for forcing include colchicum and miniature iris. When selecting bulbs for forcing look for varieties that are specifically recommended for this purpose. Most bulbs require a chilling period or period of cold temperatures before they will bloom, but bulbs sold specifically for indoor forcing are pre-chilled, removing this step for the gardener.

Paperwhites are quick and easy to start and will bloom within four to six weeks. Start by selecting a container without any drainage holes. A clear glass vase can be used so you can see the roots of the bulbs growing, but many different types of containers can be used, as long as it is deep enough to hold about 3 inches of media.

When forcing bulbs, it is not necessary to use soil as the medium, though you may. It may be easier to use washed pea gravel or glass pebbles that can be purchased at craft stores. The stones

or gravel will hold the bulbs in place as they grow. Fill the container with about 2 inches of growing medium. Then, place the paperwhite or other bulbs on top of the pebbles. For a nice display, set 7 or more bulbs close together so they almost touch. A large bunch of bulbs will be more dramatic. Set the bulbs so they are perfectly upright. Wiggle the bulbs down into the pebbles a little bit and then fill in around the bulbs with more pebbles. You do not want to completely bury the bulbs, instead, leave 1/2 to 1/3 of the bulb exposed.

Once you have the bulbs in place, add just enough water to the container to reach the base of the bulbs, but not touch the bulbs. Do not let the bulbs sit in water or they may rot. One of the reasons to use a glass container is that it is easy to see the level of the water. If you are using a solid container, just dig a small hole next to a bulb so you can see the water depth.

To start the rooting process, place your container in a cool room that gets low light or no light, such as a windowless room. Keep your container at low light levels until the roots begin to grow well and the shoots start showing - usually about 1-2 weeks. Keep an eye on the water level and refill as necessary to keep the level just below the bottom of the bulbs.

Once you have good root growth, move your bulbs into a warmer bright, sunny window and watch them grow! Once the bulbs begin to flower, move them out of direct sun so your blooms will last longer. Your home will be filled with beautiful flowers and the refreshing aroma of spring in the middle of winter. Plant batch after batch to keep flowers blooming all winter long. Paperwhite containers make beautiful centerpieces for the table during the holidays, and are also great to give as holiday bouquets. Or force paperwhites with your children to create unique gifts for their teachers or grandparents.

## **Don't Bag It: Autumn Leaves**

*David Hillock*

Bagging or burning leaves are two methods of leaf disposal that no longer fit today's environmental needs. Sending bagged leaves to the landfill uses precious space, and burning leaves contributes to air pollution and the risk of wildfire. Composting is the best way to deal with your fall tree leaves and produces a rich source of organic matter for your gardens.

Leaves can easily be composted at home. A compost pile is built by layering organic materials. Compost piles should be 3 to 4 feet wide and 3 to 4 feet high. This volume is large enough to allow the pile to heat as composting occurs and small enough to allow for easy turning. You can build bins for composting, but a simple pile works as well.

Another way to use your autumn leaves is to simply rake them into landscape beds and use as mulch. Leaving leaves in these areas provides habitat for beneficial insects and micro-organisms.

For some reason my yard seems to collect most of the leaves in the neighborhood so I can't rake all of them into my beds or they would smother some of my plants. Instead I run over some of them with the lawnmower, chopping them into little pieces to add organic matter to the lawn.

The side yard is shady and slightly sloped so I just dump a majority of the leaves in that area to provide valuable nutrients for the trees, provide erosion control, and aid in moisture retention.

If you were maintaining a vegetable garden this summer you can take chopped leaves and work them into the soil; by next spring they will be decomposed adding rich organic matter for next year's crop.

You can learn more about leaf composting in the OSU Extension Leaflet [L-252](#) – Don't Bag It: Leaf Composting.