

Horticulture Tips

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

GARDEN TIPS FOR SEPTEMBER!

David Hillock

Landscape

- Watch for fall specials at garden centers and nurseries since fall is a great time for planting many ornamentals.
- Choose spring flowering bulbs as soon as available.
- Plant cool-season annuals like pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, snapdragons and dusty miller when temperatures begin to cool.
- Watch for and control any late infestations of tree webworms.
- Twig girdler insects should be controlled if large numbers of small branches of elms, pecans, or persimmons are uniformly girdled from the tree and fall to the ground.
- Begin to reduce the amount of light on outside tropical houseplants by placing them under shade trees before bringing them indoors for the winter.

Vegetables

- You have all of September to plant cool-season vegetables like spinach, leaf lettuce, mustard and radishes, and until the middle of September to plant rutabagas, Swiss chard, garlic and turnips.

Lawn

- Last nitrogen fertilizer application of the year on warm-season grasses should be applied no later than September 15. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Winter broadleaf weeds like dandelion will begin to emerge in late September, which is also the best time to control them with a 2, 4-D type herbicide.
- If pre-emergent control of winter-annual weeds (henbit, chickweed, annual bluegrass, etc.) is desired in lawns, the application should be completed by the 2nd week of September. *Note: Do not treat areas that will be seeded in the fall.*
- Continue bermudagrass spray program with glyphosate products for areas being converted over to tall fescue this fall.
- Plan to seed bluegrass, fescue or ryegrass as needed in shady areas in mid- to late-September. Fall is the best time to establish cool-season lawns ([HLA-6419](#)).
- White grub damage can become visible this month. Apply appropriate soil insecticide if white grubs are a problem ([EPP-7306](#)). Water product into soil.

Pecan Harvest Field Days

Becky Carroll



Choose Your Date: October 18 or October 25

Agenda:

- 1:00 pm – Registration
- 1:30 pm – Preparation or Orchard Floor
- 2:15 pm – Harvesting Demonstration
- 3:15 pm – Marketing Decisions
- 4:00 pm – Q & A Session/Adjourn

Required Registration Information:

Noble Research Institute – October 18: <https://www.noble.org/events/pecan-harvest-field-day>

Cimarron Valley Research Station – October 25: Email stephanie.larimer@okstate.edu or call 405-744-5404

Fall is for Planting Trees and Shrubs

David Hillock

Fall is an excellent time to plant most trees and shrubs. In fact research suggests that early fall planting is best for container-grown and B&B shade and ornamental trees and pines, but spring is best for planting bare-root plants and broadleaf evergreens, such as holly and Southern magnolia. Plants planted in the fall have more time for the root system to become established before the onset of summer heat. Plants installed during the growing season are susceptible to high transpiration rates leading to drying of plant tissues.

A perfect example of this was seen at the *Oklahoma Gardening Studio Gardens* several years ago when blueberry shrubs were planted the Edible Landscape bed. One blueberry shrub was

planted in the fall and then several more were planted in the spring. There was a noticeable difference between the one planted in the fall and those planted the following spring; in spite of the heat the fall planted shrub looked awesome and was barely phased by the extreme temperatures that summer. The others struggled, having crispy leaves, dropping many of them, and barely hanging on in spite of the intense watering provided to keep them alive.

So, if you need to replace a tree or shrub or want to add more to the landscape, now is the time to be looking for that perfect plant. The weather should be changing for the better as we move through the month of September, bringing cooler temperatures and additional rainfall, something we all will eagerly welcome and our plants will greatly appreciate.

Moving Plants Indoor for Winter

David Hillock

If you brought houseplants out into the summer sunshine, you want to start thinking about preparing them for their return journey indoors late this month. As a general rule, you will want to move houseplants indoors around the time that the outside temperature is about the same as the indoor temperature. This will give plants a chance to adjust to the indoor climate before you turn on the heat and avoid unnecessary cold damage to tropicals.

Moving a plant directly from its perch on the sunny patio to its winter home in the dark living room is not advisable. You will shock the plant with the drastic change in light conditions. Instead, acclimate the plant or slowly adjust it to lower light levels. Do this by moving plants to more and more heavily shaded areas over the course of a week before finally bringing it inside.

Be sure to inspect plants for insects and diseases and treat accordingly before moving indoors. Spraying leaves and stems with a steady stream of water will help get rid of many insects. You can also wipe stems and leaves down with a soft, damp cloth. Constant drenching of the soil in the pot will also help drive out insects that have taken up residence in the soil. If the pot is small enough, you might also remove the plant from the pot to look for insects and simply remove them by hand. Plants can also be repotted to make sure there are no unwanted pests. Insecticidal soaps are safe and can be used on many houseplants; if persistent pests are suspected spray with an insecticidal soap. More than one application may be necessary. Read and follow all label directions!

Saving Seed of the Amazing Squash

Lynn Brandenberger

Squash and pumpkin originated in the Americas including parts of South America, Mexico, and Central America. Well before they were adopted by Europeans seed of these important crops were carried into northern regions of the Americas by Native Americans as important food crops (Peirce, 1987). This group of cucurbits includes members from *C. maxima* (winter squash), *C. pepo* (summer squash, pumpkin), *C. moschata* (squash and pumpkins both with narrower necks), and *C. mixta* (cushaws, pear-shaped).

Orange-fleshed pumpkins contain significant levels of vitamin A along with calcium and folate. Other squash relatives including summer and zucchini squashes have lower levels of calcium, folate, and vitamin A (<https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search/list>). Additionally pumpkin seed can be roasted and eaten as a nutritious snack that is a source of energy and some protein.

To save seed a person will first need to consider if the variety is open pollinated and if the fruit of the squash has been cross pollinated by other varieties and possibly other species of cucurbits, but more about that later. Seed of open-pollinated varieties can be saved by what is known as “Wet-seed extraction”. Extracting seed involves cutting open the fruit of a given squash or pumpkin and then placing those wet-seed in a container with the juice from the fruit and adding a little water if the seed is relatively dry. Allow the seed 3-4 days to ferment which will loosen up all the fruit pulp from the seed, stir the seed/water mix daily during fermentation. After fermenting, the seed can be washed over a screen and placed into a container where all the floaters (not good seed) can be skimmed off and the heavier seed (the good seed) can then be screened again. After screening for the last time seed should be placed in the open air preferably on a screen with good air movement around the seed. This should be done inside to prevent over heating of the seed from contact by direct sunlight and to protect the seed from pests. Seed are dried to around 10-12% moisture which can either be measured by a moisture meter or when the seed become fairly brittle when bitten in your teeth. After this, seed can be stored in cool and dry conditions i.e. frost-free refrigerator or freezer.

Both commercial growers and home gardeners are interested in saving seeds from older squash varieties. Most years we receive questions about whether different cucurbits need to be separated to prevent cross-pollination. If you are wanting to save seed of an open-pollinated variety that will work, but don't bother saving seed of hybrids. If there are other squash around then cross pollination is likely to happen since the insects that pollinate often travel significant distances (up to a mile). Some species of cucurbits will also cross with other cucurbit species so you will need to ask yourself, will my variety-species cross with others that may be in my garden or field? This question has been asked for decades, so much so that Dr. Dean McCraw (retired OSU horticulture specialist) wrote a Hort Tips article about it back in the 1980's. What follows are Dean's responses to these on-going questions.

Information about cucurbit pollination and crossing comes from Hortus Third, Cornell University, Cucurbits. 1962. Whitaker, T.W. and G.N. Davis. Interscience, NY, NY. In order to understand the genetic relationships that various cucurbits have to one another it is important to realize that this group of crops includes several subfamilies and genera with several species in a given genus. Crosses can occur between varieties within the same species or between different species as given in the following diagram.

Possibilities for crossing among species of Cucurbita (Pumpkins & Squash)				
Field pumpkin	C. Pepo		C. maxima	Turban squash
Vegetable Marrow				Banana squash
Acorn squash				Hubbard squash
Yellow flowered gourds				
Bush Summer Squash				
Crookneck				
Straight-neck				
Scallop				
Zucchini				
				C. moschata
Butternut			Pumpkin	
			Cushaw	
			Silver-seed gourd	
<p>*Crossing does not occur between species joined by solid lines. Crossing can only occur between species joined by dashed lines, but the effect will only be within the seed, there will be no effect on the current season fruit that contains the seed.</p> <p>Watermelon (<i>Citrullus lunatus</i>), cucumber (<i>Cucumis sativus</i>) and muskmelon (<i>Cucumis melo</i> var. <i>reticulatus</i>) will not cross with each other, but will cross with cultivars within their respective species.</p>				

Cool-season Lawn Planting and Renovation

David Hillock and Dennis Martin

The period mid-September through early October in Oklahoma typically has near-ideal day/night temperature combinations for germination of cool-season grasses. So, let the tall fescue, perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass seeding begin (if you have access to water)! Sodding of these grasses is also appropriate at this time. The best temperatures for germination are when we experience a mid-80s day and upper 50s/low 60s night. You might be asking, is it possible that we will get fooled and the temperatures will shoot back up. Sure, anything is possible in Oklahoma, but what is key to remember is that the night time lows are what's important. When you see evening temperatures from the upper 50s to mid-70s, it's time to seed cool-season lawns. So even if a few day-time highs slip back in the mid to upper 90s, (and it will happen) our day-time lows are looking great!

Fact sheet HLA-6418 covers turfgrass selection, while HLA-6419 covers the establishment (planting method) and HLA-6420 covers the mainstream long-term maintenance practices (mowing, fertilization, irrigation, etc). A newer fact sheet, HLA-6608, addresses managing turfgrass in the shade. Find these on the web at the turf collection located at:

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-216>.

There are many satisfactory performing tall fescues. These include, but are not limited to Crossfire II, Hounddog V, Millenium, Rembrandt, Plantation to name just a few. There are dozens of good performers. A blend is a combination of two or more varieties within the same species. A mix is two or more species combined. Blends and mixes are beneficial in cool-season lawns as they broaden the genetic diversity present. In theory, this decreases the likelihood that your lawn will be completely wiped out by a single disease or single insect infestation.

Most importantly, if turf-type quality is expected, choose a turf-type rather than a forage type tall fescue. Forage type fescues include Fawn and Alta. General purpose soil stabilizer types include the old K-31, Kentucky 31, KY 31, they get used as a forage and as a lawn, but these variations on Kentucky 31 are not true turf-type tall fescue despite what the marketing message on the seed bag might say. Turf-types are selected for improved color, texture, density, slower vertical leaf expansion rate and other important characteristics for lawn use.

Tall fescues are best in medium to light shade. There are no hard and fast rules for “hours of sunlight” required. There are no perfect solutions to dense shade where grasses fail repeatedly, year-in and year-out. It is best to take a hint if grass is failing in a shaded site many years, it’s time to move on to mulches, shade tolerant perennial ground covers, hardscape elements, etc.; a list of alternate shade tolerant plants can also be found in fact sheet HLA-6008. Sometimes grass does not die exclusively from shade, but rather the combination of shade and tree root competition for nutrients and water in combination with added disease pressure due to less air movement and more grass canopy moisture caused by less air movement in a “tight and mature” landscape.

In lightly shaded areas, mixtures of tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass can sometimes work best. While Kentucky bluegrass is generally not as shade tolerant as tall fescue, it still has some shade tolerance and it has improved brown patch disease and *Rhizoctonia* blight resistance over that of tall fescue. Brown patch is usually the most serious disease of tall fescue. These mixtures will often have Kentucky bluegrass present at 5 to 10% by weight and tall fescue at 90 to 95%. There are 10 times as many bluegrass seeds in a pound of bluegrass as there are tall fescue seeds present in a pound of fescue so we use about 10 times less bluegrass seed to get to a 50/50 species count. Never, use a 100% stand of Kentucky bluegrass in most areas of Oklahoma because pure stands of Kentucky bluegrass in most of Oklahoma can get summer patch disease. Also, older Kentucky bluegrasses such as Park, Newport, South Dakota Common (SD Common), Kenblue and variety not stated (VNS =when there is no variety name stated) really don’t bring any value to the cool-season mix. So if these are the only ones available locally, you might as well use 100% tall fescue. Most other varieties of Kentucky bluegrass that you might encounter (there are hundreds nationally, and yet few repeatedly available in OK from year to year) are improvements and will benefit the mix!

There is seldom any benefit and there is often detriment created by mixes of cool-season perennial grasses with annual or Italian ryegrass. Yet, if you scout the store shelves, you will find these mixes. Annual ryegrass simply competes with the cool-season perennial grasses in the mix in the cool portion of the year when good growth can take place and then annual ryegrass, having taken its fair share of the lawn, dies out in the heat. This leaves uniformed consumers in a panic

at worst and with unsightly dead areas in their remaining cool-season perennial lawn at best. Avoid mixes of annual ryegrass with the desirable cool-season perennials like tall fescue, perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass.

Soil Testing...the Right First Step

David Hillock

We all appreciate thick green lawns and lush productive gardens around the home. After all, attractive lawns and gardens add to both the aesthetic value and real value of our homes.

To achieve a high level of lawn quality and garden productivity, it is necessary to add fertilizer on a timely basis. When lawns and gardens don't receive the amount of fertilizer that they need, they never achieve the quality or productivity we anticipate. When too much fertilizer is applied, nutrients are wasted and pose a threat to the environment.

The true value of a soil test is to help insure that only needed nutrients are added in quantities which don't adversely affect environmental quality.

The best time test the soil is during a time when plants aren't growing, although any time of year is satisfactory. In any case it is better to have the soil tested rather than guess which fertilizers to use and how much to apply. To make sure the test is accurate, sample the soil before fertilizer has been applied and follow proper collection procedures.

A soil test is only as good as the sample submitted for testing. Samples collected should represent the lawn or garden as a whole. The following steps will help in collecting good samples for submission.

- Scrape plant debris from the soil surface before sampling
- Sample lawns to a depth of 3-4". Sample gardens to a 6" depth.
- Use a clean bucket or other container and a soil probe or spade; collect cores or slices of soil from at least 10 different areas scattered throughout the lawn or garden and mix them together in the container.
- Mix soil thoroughly and fill the sample bag (bag can be obtained from your OSU County Extension Office) with a pint of the mixture.
- Submit samples and completed information sheet to your OSU County Extension Office. They will send samples in to the OSU Soil, Water, and Forage Laboratory for testing and then help you interpret the results.

The benefits of soil testing are many – it takes advantage of nutrients already in the soil, identifies nutrients that are lacking, reduces fertilizer applications, provides a proper balance of plant nutrients, allows adjustment of soil pH to an optimum level, and reduces chances of excess nutrients getting into the water sources.

For more information about soil testing contact your OSU County Extension Office or read leaflet [L-249](#) - Soil Testing...the First Right Step.

Harvesting, Curing, and Preparing Gourds for Decorations

David Hillock

There are three types of gourds commonly used for crafts and decorations. The first group falls under the genus *Cucurbita* and includes such gourds as Egg, Apple, Orange, White Pear, Spoon, Finger, Warty, Miniature, Flat Striped, and Turk's Turban. A second group is in the *Lagenaria* genus and includes Giant Bottle, Birdhouse, Tobacco Box, Giant African, Hercules Club, Caveman's Club, Dipper, Calabash, Corsican Flat, and Maranka. The third type is the *Luffa* gourd, or sometimes called sponge gourd or vining okra.

Harvesting, Curing, and Shellacking

Cucurbita gourds ripen first, usually *Lagenaria* ripen next and *Luffa* last.

A *Cucurbita* gourd is ripe when the fruit has become hard. If vines die before the fruits become hard, keeping quality will be poor. Press gently in the surface of the gourd to determine hardness, but avoid the fingernail test, which will cause spoilage if an immature fruit is punctured. Browning and drying of the fruit stem can indicate maturity, but is unreliable if vines die prematurely.

Lagenaria fruits are fully ripe when they: turn from green to tan, are light weight, and have a firm shell. If left long enough, seeds inside become dry and rattle. This dry stage of maturity may not be reached before frost. Fruits that are still green and have a solid hardness can be harvested before frost. With proper curing, they will dry without decay or shrinkage. If they wrinkle or get soft, they should be thrown away. As long as they remain hard they may be saved. They may mold and become unsightly, but can be put out of sight and kept for craftwork.

Luffa gourds are ripe when the shell is paper dry. You do not have to wait until the *Luffa* fruits are dry before harvesting them. If they have reached full size or have started to turn brown, they can be harvested and allowed to complete maturity off the plant. In Northern Oklahoma, fruits may not reach full size until late September, even though seeds have been started indoors. In NW Oklahoma and the Panhandle, you may want to harvest a bit early and let them dry inside.

How to Harvest – Use sharp shears to harvest all gourd fruits, never twist them from the plant. Cut specimens with up to several inches of fruit stem attached. If possible, harvest on a clear, cool day. Handle gourds carefully so they are not bruised or scratched. A bruise now means decay later.

Cleaning and Curing – Wash fruits in warm, mild soapy water, then rinse and dry. A soft brush can be used during washing to remove dirt embedded in warty specimens. A household disinfectant added to the clear rinse water can reduce soil-borne decay organisms.

Lay gourds on several layers of newspaper in a warm sunny place with good air circulation to remove surface moisture.

Cucurbita gourds should be completely dry before lacquer or shellac is applied. Fans can be used to hasten drying prior to shellacking.

Lagenaria gourds should be laid out so that specimens do not touch each other during curing. A temperature of 65 to 80 degrees with low humidity hastens curing. Immature specimens may take several months to dry completely and a somewhat lower temperature can retard shriveling. The use of shelves or trays with good ventilation permits more gourds to be cured in an area.

Shellacking – Discard any specimens that show bruises or decay. Use only clean, dry mature fruits. Use a four-pound shellac cut 50 percent with denatured alcohol. Either dip the fruits into the solution or brush it on and allow to dry. Old shellac may not dry properly and surface tackiness may persist.

In addition to shellac, it is possible to use acrylic resin spray, lacquer, or waxes to give attractive luster to gourds, especially *Cucurbita* colored types.

Preparing Gourds for Decoration – Faded *Cucurbita* gourds or those that are shellacked can be made into ornaments, but the shell should be dry if the decorated specimen is expected to last. Remove waxes and shellac. Sandpaper rough spots.

Lagenaria gourds should be completely dry. During curing, the thin outer skin can be scraped away to permit more rapid loss of moisture from inside. A sharp knife or single-edged razor blade can remove the skin quickly. Take care not to mar the woody shell during skin removal. Sanding the surface of *Lagenaria* gourds need not be done if they have an attractive pattern of molds that were present during curing. These surface molds do not decay the gourd, but give it an attractive appearance of natural beauty. They are then ready for craftwork.

Luffa gourds can be prepared when the skin is brown. First peel the skin from the fibrous interior. The skin of *Luffa aegyptiaca* fruits will separate quite readily if the fibrous interior is still moist. After peeling, remove the seeds by shaking, and then wash the fibrous sponge in warm soapy water. If the fibers are to be whitened, place the sponge in a solution of laundry bleach, rinse and dry in the sun. The sponge can now be used as is or moistened and dried again while being compressed between papers with weights on top.

Gourds commonly are associated with the harvest season and are featured at Halloween and Thanksgiving, often as shellacked arrangements of assorted *Cucurbita*. With imaginative decorating, they can become Christmas ornaments for the tree, mantle, and table.