

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 MARCH!

David Hillock

Lawn and Turf

- Remove excessive thatch from warm-season lawns. Dethatching, if necessary, should precede crabgrass control treatment. ([HLA-6604](#))
- Broadleaf weeds can easily be controlled in cool-season lawns at this time with post-emergent broadleaf herbicides.
- Preemergent crabgrass control chemicals can still be applied to cool- and warm-season turfgrasses. Heed label cautions when using any weed killers near or in the root zone of desirable plantings.
- March is the second best time of the year to seed cool-season turfgrass; however, fall is the best time to plant. ([HLA-6419](#))
- Cool-season lawns such as bluegrass, fescue, and ryegrass may be fertilized now with the first application of the season. Usually, four applications of fertilizer are required per year, in March, May, October, and November. ([HLA-6420](#))
- Begin mowing cool-season grasses at 1½ to 3½ inches high. ([HLA-6420](#))

Flowers & Vegetables

- Cultivate annual flower and vegetable planting beds to destroy winter weeds.
- Apply mulch to control weeds in beds. Landscape fabric barrier can reduce the amount of mulch but can dry out and prevent water penetration. Thus, organic litter makes the best mulch.
- Prune roses just before growth starts and begin a regular disease spray program as the foliage appears on susceptible varieties. ([HLA-6403](#) & [EPP-7607](#))
- Avoid excessive walking and working in the garden when foliage and soils are wet.
- Start warm-season vegetable transplants indoors.
- Divide and replant overcrowded, summer and fall blooming perennials. Mow or cut back old liriopse and other ornamental grasses before new growth begins.
- Your cool-season vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, carrot, lettuce, onion, peas, spinach, turnips etc. should be planted by the middle of March.
- Watch for cutworms that girdle newly planted vegetables during the first few weeks of establishment. Cabbage looper and cabbageworm insects should be monitored and controlled in the garden ([EPP-7313](#)).

Trees & Shrubs

- Prune spring flowering plants, if needed, immediately following their bloom period.
- Plant evergreen shrubs, balled and burlapped, and bare root trees and shrubs.
- Anthracnose control on sycamore, maple, and oak should begin at bud swell. ([EPP-7634](#)).
- Diplodia Pine Tip blight control on pines begins at bud swell.
- Chemical and physical control of galls (swellings) on stems of trees should begin now. ([EPP-7168](#) & [EPP-7306](#))
- Dormant oil can still be applied to control mites, galls, overwintering aphids, etc. ([EPP-7306](#))
- The first generation of Nantucket Pine Tip Moth appears at this time. Begin pesticide applications in late March. ([EPP-7306](#))
- Control Eastern tent caterpillars as soon as the critters appear.

Fruits

- Continue to plant strawberries, asparagus, and other small fruit crops this month.
- Start your routine fruit tree spray schedule prior to bud break. ([EPP-7319](#)).
- Remove winter mulch from strawberries in early March ([HLA-6214](#)).

Spring Cleaning

David Hillock

If you haven't cut back your ornamental grasses and perennials by now, this would be a good time to finish this spring cleaning chore. New growth will begin to emerge soon on some grasses and perennials; waiting until new growth is several inches high will make it difficult to remove dead foliage without damaging the new growth. In addition, old leaves may be harboring diseases and insects from last season that could infect new growth if not removed from the garden. Removing old leaves also allows plenty of sunlight in to warm the soil and encourage new growth.

Pruning Roses

David Hillock

The pruning of roses varies according to flowering habit and plant vigor. Most Oklahoma roses should not be pruned before March 15. Pruning tends to cause new growth which is often killed by late spring freezes. However, most modern roses should be pruned annually. Prune to maintain plant shape, remove dead or diseased wood (often dark or blackened canes), and regulate desired flower size. If only a few large flowers are preferred, cut the plants more severely. Too much spring pruning can weaken plants. If a large number of average-sized flowers are preferred, only light or moderate pruning is necessary. Long-handled pruning clippers (loppers) and hand clippers are needed for pruning roses. A sharp, fine-toothed pruning saw is also useful for cutting large dead canes.

Leaves and stems grow from buds. Bud position determines the shape of the plant. Prune for an open-centered plant. Thus, make all cuts just above outward-facing buds. Make the cut slightly above and angling downward away from the bud. Remove branches that grow toward the center of the plant. When two branches cross, the smaller one should be removed. Any growth originating below the union with the understock should be removed from such budded roses as hybrid teas and floribundas. If the average number of leaflets on the stems of such roses is more than five, the cane is probably understock.

Hybrid tea roses usually require relatively severe pruning because of winterkill of the canes. In the spring, remove dead or diseased canes. Then, cut back remaining canes to six to 24 inches, depending on plant vigor and desired flowering.

Grandifloras, floribundas, and polyanthas require less pruning. Remove dead or diseased canes and shape the plant.

Ramblers and small flowered climbers that bloom only in the spring should be pruned immediately following bloom. Spring flowering roses and shrubs set flowering buds in late spring and summer. Remove canes that have flowered from the base or crown of the plant. Train or tie up developing new shoots.

Large flowered climbers that bloom only in the spring are also pruned right after flowering. Cut back side shoots that have flowered, and remove the oldest canes. Train up only enough new canes to cover the desired area and remove the rest.

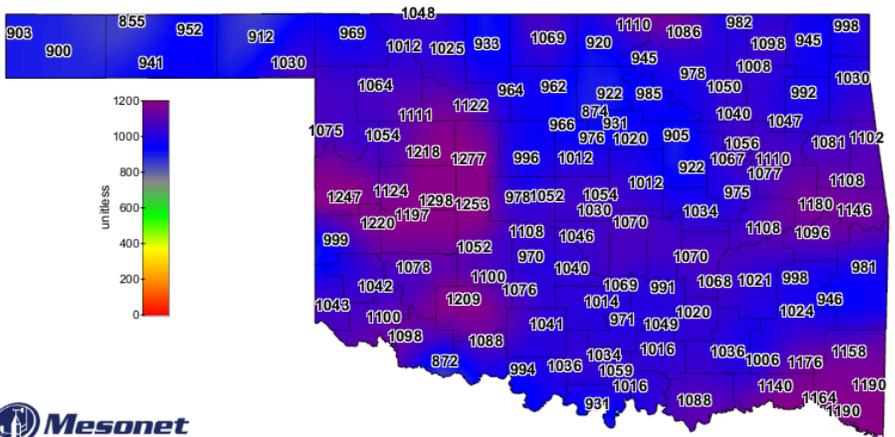
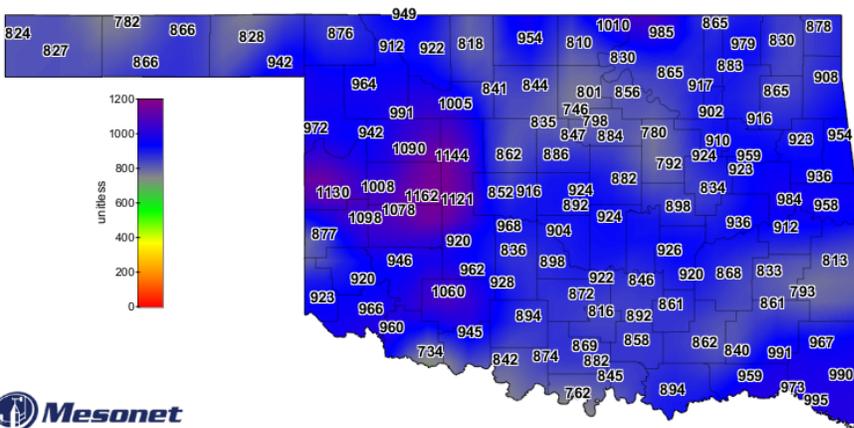
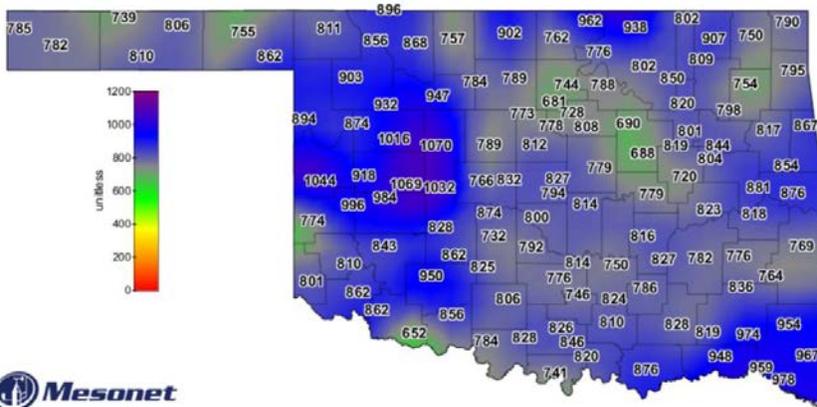
Remove only very weak or dead branches of climbers that bloom all summer. These climbers can be pruned lightly after the first burst of bloom.

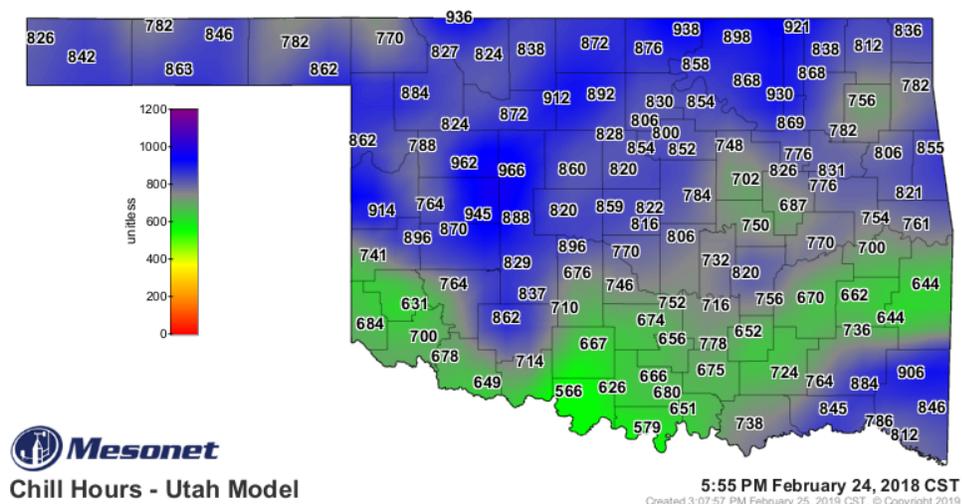
Heavy cutting of flowers, particularly with long stems, should be avoided during a plant's first year of growth. This will allow the plant to become established more readily. Remove all flowers or flower clusters just above the first five leaflet leaves when the petals begin to fall. Even when cutting flowers from established plants, do not remove more foliage than necessary. Let autumn roses produce hips (seed pods) to induce early freeze hardiness.

Chill Hours Update

Becky Carroll

Take a look at the February issue of Horticulture Tips for information on chill hours. Here's the updated maps to show this year's progression. The last map is of 2018 at this time.





Native Pecan Field Day Scheduled

Becky Carroll

Interested in native pecan production? If so, add April 25 to your calendar. We will meet at the 5 Star Pecan & Cattle Ranch in Okfuskee County. The afternoon meeting will cover many potential topics to highlight tree thinning, grafting selected natives, pruning, pest management, logging/sawmills, and hopefully some aspect of cattle/grazing. More information will be sent later with details of the free event.

Camp TURF 2019

Shelley Mitchell

Applications for Camp TURF 2019 are currently being taken. Camp TURF is for rising 9th and 10th graders, and is a free 2-week residential summer academy with hands-on activities in horticulture and landscape architecture. Students stay in residential suites on the OSU campus. The 2019 dates for Camp TURF are June 2-14. The application and more information are available at www.hortla.okstate.edu under "Research, Extension and Youth Programs".

Dish Gardens for County and State Fairs

Shelley Mitchell

The past few years at the county and state fairs have seen an increase in both the size and weight of dish garden entries in the 4-H classes. For safety reasons, and to go back to the true meaning of "dish gardens" (grown in a shallow dish or bowl), the rules are getting more specific. The maximum size of dish garden entries is now 15" in diameter, with a weight limit of 15 pounds maximum. Because of the ever increasing emphasis on decorations and reduction in living plant

material, decorations now cannot take up more than 20% of the dish garden. Dish gardens should be small containers of compatible plants that will stay small or be pruned so as to stay in proportion to the container. The plants themselves should be the main focus of the dish garden.

Training Young Shade and Ornamental Trees

David Hillock

Proper pruning when a tree is young will ultimately result in a tree that is structurally stronger, longer-lived, and less costly to maintain.

Training a tree early in its life may prevent storm damage when the tree approaches maturity in 15 to 20 years. Training young trees should help reduce storm damage and expensive pruning operations when the tree is mature.

There is no need to prune a newly-planted tree unless branches have been damaged. It has been found that removing tips and buds of young trees slows root growth. If trees are left unpruned, expanding buds and new leaves help root expansion and tree establishment. Damaged branches can be removed at their point of origin, or they can be cut back to a lateral branch that will yield foliage and bolster establishment the first season.

Training begins the year after transplanting, continues through the next three to five years, and should be complete within eight to ten years. Following the training period, only maintenance pruning should be needed.

At planting, decide on the system of guidance or training you will follow based on the tree species' growth habits. For instance, most oaks and sycamore develop a central leader, whereas species such as elm and mulberry will always fork somewhere in the main trunk. For these species, develop a modified central leader. The modified central leader is the most desirable system for fruit trees doubling as yard trees.

Walk around the tree before making any cuts and inspect the overall branching structure. Remove branches that are rubbing, shooting inward, or competing too closely to another branch. Narrow branch angles may also need to be removed as they can be weak joints susceptible to breakage. However, some species have narrow branch angles and still have strong joints such as zelkova.

Early in the tree's life, decide which closely spaced scaffold branches to keep. Scaffold branches are large branches that form the main structure of the tree. Try to visualize how the tree will look as it thickens in years to come. Know the natural form of the species. Remember — branches do not slowly rise above the ground! As a tree grows, branches retain their position on the trunk, though they increase in diameter and become more crowded. Spacing scaffold branches radially and vertically allows growth to be channeled where it will be more effective. No more than 1/4 of the canopy should be removed at any one time.

During the training years, frequent inspections must be made to channel growth in desirable directions. The more vigorous species require closer attention. At the end of the season after leaf fall, inspect the tree and make any necessary corrective cuts.

The tip of the main trunk of a young shade tree should not be cut back. Heading back, as is practiced, is not beneficial to most trees and often results in undesirable forks in the main trunk. This is especially true of species that already fork, such as elm and maple.

For more information about training shade and ornamental trees see OSU fact sheet [HLA-6415](#) Training Young Shade and Ornamental Trees.

Priority: Pollinators

David Hillock

Honeybees have been disappearing in record numbers, and they are not the only pollinators that are imperiled. Some butterflies and native bees have experienced significant population declines also, says Eric Mäder, Assistant Pollinator Program Director for the Xerces Society.

It was just a few years ago that homeowners were asking what they could plant that would not attract bees. Now, the question is more likely to be, “How can I attract bees and other pollinators to my garden?”

Pollinators are a diverse and fascinating group of invertebrates, and we have them to thank for beautiful blooming meadows, juicy summer berries, bountiful vegetable gardens, and colorful pumpkins and gourds.

The Home Garden Seed Association, inspired by the conservation work of the Xerces Society, encourages all home gardeners to help the cause of pollinator protection by planting more flowers, an important food resource for all kinds of bees and butterflies. Every flower border, bed, and windowbox helps!

Visit www.bringbackthepollinators.org and sign the Pollinator Protection Pledge. You can also order a Pollinator Habitat sign for your garden.



“Providing patches of flowers is one thing we can do to improve the environment for pollinators.” The Xerces Society

FACTS

- Flowers clustered in clumps of at least four feet in diameter are more attractive to pollinators than scattered individual flowers.
- A succession of flowering plants that lasts from spring through fall will support a range of bee species.
- Flowers of different shapes will attract different types of pollinators.
- Pesticides are a major threat to insect pollinators.
- The value, in dollars, of pollinators' services to our food business is estimated to be upwards of \$4 billion—nothing to sneeze at!

Source: ezfromseed.org. The Home Garden Seed Association promotes gardening from seed — an easy, economical, and rewarding way to garden.

Looking Forward to Early Spring Greens

Lynn Brandenberger

If you're like me you are anticipating spring and the opportunity to begin this year's garden. That said, I'm not talking about tomatoes or other warm season fruiting vegetables. If you've never tried growing cool season greens now is the time to consider it since you can begin much earlier in the gardening year. There are several crops within this group and they prefer cool or even cold temperatures and the great thing is that several of these are nutritional super stars!



Kale

There are several leafy greens that grow best during the cool months of February-April, some belong to the brassica family such as kale, collard, turnip, mustard, etc. and several belong to the spinach family including spinach, Swiss chard, and beet-greens. All of these can be started either by direct seeding or if you want to use transplants they can be transplanted.

The great thing about cool season brassica greens is that they will germinate and emerge from the soil relatively quick compared to warm season crops. Gardeners don't often use transplants for these crops unless they want to guarantee the uniformity of the stand. Another advantage to all of the cool season greens is that you aren't growing the crop for flowers or fruit, just leaf tissue which simplifies a lot of things (less to go wrong). Leafy brassicas have fairly small seeds (9,000-15,000 seeds/oz.) so don't plant them very deep (1/4 to 3/8 inch depth). Spinach has a little bigger seed (2,000-3,000 seeds/oz.), but can be a bit challenging to obtain a stand. Seed spinach and its relatives 3/8 to 1/2 inch deep and make certain the soil doesn't crust over. One method gardeners can use to deal with poor spinach stands is to pre-germinate spinach seed and plant only seeds that have an emerged seed root (radicle).

When growing greens that will be harvested at an early stage you can crowd the seed together a little, seed spacing between 3 to 6 inches in the row are recommended. Soil temperatures of 40 to 75°F work not only for brassicas, but also for spinach and its relatives, although spinach can be planted in soil as cool as 35°F. If you want to increase the chances of obtaining a good stand you could seed heavier than recommended then thin the stand to the desired spacing. Harvest should follow 40 to 60 days after seeding, but all these greens will vary according to their species with kale being somewhat slower than some of the other brassicas.

Pest issues with cool season greens can include both disease and insect pests along with weedy competitors. Selecting varieties that have natural resistance to various disease pests is a good practice (<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1386/HLA-6032web.pdf>). Most brassicas including brassica greens will have some challenges from the cabbage looper, but *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.T.) is a great natural way to control this lepidopteran pest. Other insect pests that may be a problem include various aphid species, soil insects such as wireworm, grubworm, and cutworms (<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1317/EPP-7313web2015.pdf>). All pests will need to be scouted for on a weekly basis and managed with appropriate methods if they are causing serious damage.

None of the cool season greens tolerate water or nutrient stress well. Most will require at least the equivalent of 1-2 inches of water per week and will benefit from adequate levels of phosphorus and potassium as recommended by your soil test results. In addition, greens will need approximately 0.017 lbs. of nitrogen per 100 sq. ft. during the growing season. Apply all phosphorus and potassium and 10-20% of the nitrogen pre-plant and work it into the soil prior to seeding or transplanting. Apply the remaining nitrogen with several small fertilizations either by broadcasting the fertilizer by hand or by injecting the nitrogen into the drip irrigation system if that is how you are applying water. Remember, you are growing leaf tissue, not flowers or fruit so don't stress your greens for lack of water or fertility.



Mustard

Harvest leafy greens after adequate leaf tissue has developed. If you are trying for micro-greens then leaves can be harvested earlier once leaves are 2-4 inches in length. If you want sizeable leaves for cooked greens then allow the leaves to grow much larger even up to 12 inches in length. Either way, you can multi-harvest your greens if you don't cut the terminal growing point which will allow leaves to continue to emerge and grow. Another approach would be to do a whole-plant cut where you would cut the plant's tap-root just below the soil surface then prepare that by washing thoroughly and using it as a very fancy salad, but that will be the end of that particular plant. Greens should be stored at 32°F and high humidity meaning you will want to store them in the vegetable crisper in your refrigerator and likely in a plastic bag to keep the humidity up.

Leafy greens can be utilized for salads, but also as a cooked green. If you are going for maximum nutrition, mixing different greens together is a great idea and if you want to cook your greens be certain to use a great recipe since that will make all the difference.