

# Horticulture Tips

## March 2020

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, Consumer Horticulturist*

#### 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 and 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 and 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](#)).

### **Oklahoma Gardening Programming for March**

*Casey Hentges, Oklahoma Gardening Host*

*Oklahoma Gardening* will resume its regular programming with new shows on the weekends of March 21-22 and 28-29.

This month you will find information about how to prune your brambles, planting potatoes, March Turf Tips, grafting of ‘Taylor’ Junipers, growing microgreens, and much more!

*Oklahoma Gardening* airs Saturdays at 11:00 am and Sundays at 3:00 pm on OETA.

### **Camp TURF Gearing up for Exciting Summer Experience**

*Shelley Mitchell, Associate Extension Specialist, 4-H and Youth*

Camp TURF (Tomorrow’s Undergraduates Realizing the Future) is a **free**, two-week residential summer academy at OSU that focuses on career exploration in the horticulture and landscape architecture fields. Up to 25 upcoming ninth and tenth graders will be selected for the academy, which runs from May 31 to June 12, 2020. All Oklahoma students currently finishing eighth or ninth grade are eligible to apply. Applications will be accepted beginning March 15, with the selection process beginning April 1. Applications are available [here](#). For more information, please contact Shelley Mitchell at [shelley.mitchell@okstate.edu](mailto:shelley.mitchell@okstate.edu) or 405-744-5755.

### **Outdoor Water Conservation Classes for the City of Edmond**

*Justin Quetone Moss, Joshua Campbell and Malia Arpon*

The City of Edmond is partnering with the ThinkWater team at Oklahoma State University to provide monthly workshops on outdoor water use efficiency. A broad range of topics will be discussed concerning efficient water use in the landscape. Each presentation will last about one hour. The workshops are free, but pre-registration is requested. Visit <http://edmondok.com/1528/2019-Outdoor-Water-Conservation-Classes> to register.

*Step Into Spring: March 10, 2:00 pm & 6:00 pm, Coffee Creek Water Resource Recovery Facility, 1600 N. Midwest Boulevard, Edmond, OK*

Spring is nearly here, so join us for the Step Into Spring workshop to get a head start preparing for spring landscaping and gardening. This FREE workshop will focus on plant selection and establishment, irrigation tips and tricks, pruning techniques, spring vegetable gardening and more.

*Made in the Shade: April 9, 9:00 am, Fire Station 5, Classroom A, 5300 E. Covell Road, Edmond, OK*

Shady areas can make it difficult to grow a healthy lawn, but there are many ways to find success in the shade. Common problems and solutions will be addressed, as well as alternatives to traditional turfgrass. We presented an introductory course last fall. This class will serve as a more thorough overview of dealing with shady areas in the yard.

Recommended Prerequisite from 2019 Workshop: Dealing with Difficult Shady Areas – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGadR1Q3nR8&feature=youtu.be>

*Water Efficient Plants: May 2, 9:00 am, Coffee Creek Water Resource Recovery Facility, 1600 N. Midwest Boulevard, Edmond, OK*

Learn how to select and grow more water efficient plants for your landscape. Oklahoma native and well-adapted plants that require minimal or no supplemental watering will be discussed. Come see some of the beautiful drought resistant plants that thrive in Oklahoma.

*Successful Landscaping in the Summer: June 16, 2:00 pm & 6:00 pm, Downtown Community Center (DCC), Auditorium, 28 E. Main, Edmond, OK*

Oklahoma summers can be tough on your yard. This workshop will cover proper irrigation, plant care and landscape maintenance tips for summer success. Learn how to survive those hot, dry, and windy Oklahoma summers and still have a beautiful yard.

*Smart Irrigation & Smart Meters for Edmond Residents: July 16, 9:00 a.m., Coffee Creek Water Resource Recovery Facility, 1600 N. Midwest Boulevard, Edmond, OK*

July is Smart Irrigation Month, an initiative to promote outdoor water use efficiency during peak summer demand. Smart irrigation technology can help homeowners to apply the right amount of water to their landscape and maximize system efficiency. The workshop will discuss smart irrigation controllers, soil moisture sensors, rain/freeze sensors, and pressure reducing spray heads. Also, an update on smart metering for the City of Edmond will be provided.

*Fall Weed Management: August 25, 2:00 pm & 6:00 pm, Downtown Community Center (DCC), Auditorium, 28 E. Main, Edmond, OK*

Late summer to early fall is a good time to think about control and prevention of those winter and spring weeds. A discussion of herbicide treatments and non-chemical control strategies will be discussed. In addition, a discussion of organic or natural products will be presented.

*Advanced Composting for the Homeowner: September 10, 2:00 pm. & 6:00 pm, Downtown Community Center (DCC), Room 207, 28 E. Main, Edmond, OK*

Compost is a natural, dark brown, humus-rich material formed from the decomposition or breakdown of organic materials such as leaves, grass clippings, and vegetable food scraps. Composting reduces the flow of material to the landfill and provides an excellent source of nutrients for your garden. Procedures for composting will be discussed, along with options for establishing a compost container, bin or pile. We presented an introductory course in fall of 2019. This class will serve as a more thorough overview of composting for the homeowner.

## **Pruning Roses**

*David Hillock*

Rose plants need pruning to tidy up their appearance; control size; and improve their vigor, growing habits and bloom. Pruning methods vary according to the type of rose plant. To keep them in bounds, spring pruning usually is more drastic. Prune about 3 to 4 weeks before the average date of the last killing frost in your area. In most of Oklahoma that would be around March 15. An exception to this rule involves climbing roses, which need to be pruned after flowering in early spring.

Probably no other aspect of growing roses has aroused as many questions as has the subject of when and how to prune roses. By following a few simple rules you can improve their appearance and vigor and control the quality and quantity of the flowers. Some fundamental practices of pruning roses correctly in all gardens, regardless of type, are: 1) remove any canes that have been damaged by insects, diseases or storms; 2) remove one of two canes which may be rubbing one another; or 3) remove canes that are spindly or smaller in diameter than the size of a pencil. After pruning, according to these general recommendations, cut hybrid teas, floribundas, grandifloras and polyanthas back to 12 inches for large flowers and 18 to 24 inches for many smaller sized flowers.

Climbing roses generally are pruned to renew plant vigor by removing the old canes since the most productive and finest blooms on climbers are produced on canes that arise from the bottom of the plant the previous year. These newer canes produce more desirable growth and flowers. Since the canes may become quite long, it is necessary to prune them back so they are maintained in the desirable area.

Old fashion or antique roses require much less pruning than modern roses. Left unpruned old fashion roses will naturally obtain a rounded shrub shape. Pruning of these roses should be confined to some shaping of the plant, removal of damaged branches, and judicious trimming back to encourage growth.

On all roses, consider the cutting of the flowers as a form of pruning. When gathering roses, always leave at least two sets of leaves on the branch from which you cut the flower to insure plant vigor. When removing faded, spent flowers, cut only as far as the first five-leaflet leaf. Make cuts on the ends of branches at 45 degree angles just slightly above an outside facing bud with the lowest point on the side opposite the bud, but not below the bud itself. Never leave stubs when removing branches, since these die and can cause problems on the plant later. Always remove branches by cutting to a lateral branch or bud, or back to the base of the rose plant.

For more information on growing roses in Oklahoma see fact sheet [HLA-6403 Roses in Oklahoma](#).

## **Fruit Tree Establishment**

*Becky Carroll, Associate Extension Specialist, Fruit & Pecans*

March is a great time to finish planting fruit trees in the yard. Bare root trees should be planted prior to budbreak but container trees can be established through March and into April. Do your homework to purchase recommended varieties or those with disease resistance. Protect tree roots from freezing or drying out prior to planting. If you are unable to plant bareroot trees after receiving, heel them in outside to protect the root system. 'Heeling in' means to lay tree roots in a shallow trench covered over by soil or mulch. Plant trees at the same depth that they were planted at the nursery or more shallow. Shallow is better than too deep. Digging the planting hole just deep enough for the root system will help prevent settling after planting. After planting, be sure to tamp the soil down well to avoid air pockets that can allow tree roots to dry out. Water in really well to settle soil and get your trees off to a good start. With peaches or trees with open center structures, prune off about knee high or 18" tall. Apples and pears that will be grown in a modified leader system, prune off about 30-36". Starting the first year with training is important to get good structure set. Planting and Early Care of the Peach Orchard gives information for getting started - <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1026/HLA-6244web-2013.pdf>

First year trees don't need fertilizer applied until the tree has begun to grow. Apply a complete fertilizer like 10-10-10 the first few years. About 1 pound of fertilizer in a strip about 12" from the trunk will be sufficient. With very rainy springs, splitting the application may be helpful to avoid leaching nutrients into the soil. The second year amount can be increased by about 1 pound and applied right before budbreak. Check out recommendations for older trees in Fertilizing Pecan and Fruit Tree Fact Sheet - <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1010/HLA-6232web.pdf>

Weed control has proven to be more important in establishing new trees than nutrients or water. Using herbicides properly, mulches, fabric or other types of mats will assist with preventing weed growth and protecting young trees from alleopathic compounds produced by common weeds and grasses. These compounds slow the growth of the tree. Research has shown just one pigweed or primrose can reduce tree growth tremendously. Those trees with good weed control will have better survivability, grow faster and come into production quicker. At least 6 feet square protection will be beneficial to tree health but smaller weed free areas are better than no

control. Fact Sheet CR-6242 (<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1017/CR-6242web2019.pdf>) gives many options for weed control.

## **Pruning Storm Damaged Trees**

*Casey Hentges*

Oklahomans are no strangers to icy winters and while we as gardeners may have endured, some of the plants in our garden may be struggling. Although we are not out of the woods yet, since we are notorious for getting those early spring ice storms, this is a good time to give some attention to your trees if you have not yet done so.

The first question you might be asking yourself is can my ice damaged tree recover or does it need to be removed? I would like to give you a clear set of guidelines that makes that determination easy, unfortunately it can be a very subjective decision and emotions or the sentimental significance of the tree can also factor into your decision. But with that said, there are a couple of things to consider.

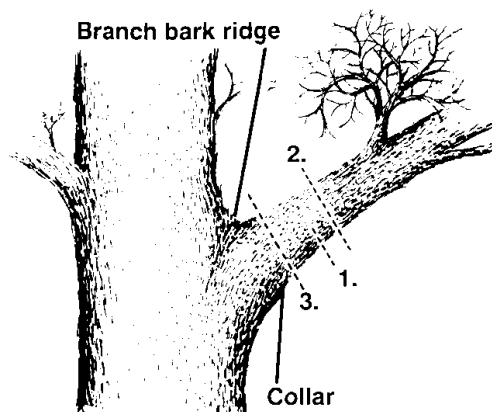
1. Use common sense and ask yourself if the damage has perhaps rendered this tree hazardous? Does it now look vulnerable to any additional wind or ice event that could cause it to fall in its entirety or at least “drop” one or more large branch that could damage nearby property or prove fatal to people and pets?
2. Even if the tree can be salvaged, determine whether it will ever look “right” again with some semblance of symmetry. A general rule of thumb is if over 1/3 of the tree is damaged, then you likely want to consider removing it.
3. Can the tree be replaced easily? Is the tree a fast grower and it is available at nurseries? Or perhaps is this an opportunity to plant a new tree that will be better suited for your garden?
4. If significant bark has been ripped or loosened from the trunk, you need be realistic about the tree’s potential for attack from opportunistic microorganisms and damaging insects outlined later.

The next thing you want to consider is if you are able and willing to tackle this task yourself or is the tree too large. It is important to know your limitations and when to call in the experts. Often trees that have suffered from storm damage are much larger than what we can manage as homeowners. An International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborist will know how to properly prune your tree and will have the climbing gear to do so safely and will haul off the debris. In addition to hiring an ISA certified arborist, like other contractors you hire to do work around your home, you want to make sure they are insured.

If you determine your tree is a manageable size, then you want to first look at what is broken or damaged. Unfortunately, mother nature doesn’t typically break the branches where the preferred pruning cut should be made so it is our job to come in and clean up the cuts.

If we were to leave damaged branches, several things could go wrong. Because the branches are often broken and jagged a great deal of surface area is exposed, making it more susceptible to insects, disease, and rot. In nature, this is just what happens in order to get rid of the old wood, but in your home landscape if you are wanting to preserve a tree, you want to mitigate this. Also, because broken branch often lose structural integrity, if new branches do sprout from it, they won't be strongly attached and can pose a liability in the future. It is also not ideal to cut a branch in the middle because it is unable to callus over and won't be able to protect itself from opportunistic pathogens and insects.

To remove damaged limbs you want to use the 3-cut method to further prevent damage to the tree. If we just simple cut this branch, the weight of it as it falls would rip the bark underneath and cause even greater damage. So the first cut you should make is a cut underneath, therefore when we are cutting the branch the bark will only be pulled back to this cut. This cut should be made out past the swollen area of the branch known as the collar. Next make the upper cut to remove the weight of the branch and this should be done out further on the limb than the undercut. Now, with the bulk of the limb removed, we need to clean up branch by making our third and final cut. To make this cut you once again want to identify the branch collar and the branch bark ridge. These two areas have cells that will callus over the wound. It is critical not to cut into these two areas. Therefore you do not want to make a cut that is parallel to the tree truck, instead, the cut should be perpendicular to the branch. Now this will eventually callus over and prevent insect and pathogens from invading. It is also important to note that you should apply any pruning paints. With these steps you will make proper cuts to get your tree back in shape.



Oklahoma Gardening Video - <https://youtu.be/dVDsrPU1wAM>

Fact sheet EPP-7323 - <http://factsheets.okstate.edu/documents/epp-7323-managing-storm-damaged-trees/>

## **Establishing a New Vegetable Garden**

*David Hillock*

**Site Selection** – The following is a list of considerations when selecting a site for the vegetable garden:

- Sun exposure – select a site that receives at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day. Southern exposures are ideal for greatest sun incidence.
- Soil – well-drained soils such as sandy loam provide ideal conditions for growing vegetables. Soil pH near 6.6 is optimal. Avoid steep slopes where erosion will be a problem.
- Air flow – avoid low-lying areas as these tend to collect cold air which slows germination and plant development in spring.
- Avoid placing a vegetable garden near walnut trees. Walnuts exude a substance called juglone from their roots which is allelopathic, meaning it can kill other plants. Tomatoes and other solanaceous plants are highly sensitive to juglone.
- Make sure the site is situated near a water supply.

**Removing Vegetation** – It is important to start with a clean slate when preparing a new garden bed. And this means removing existing vegetation and controlling weeds. Usually, this is a chore for the summer prior to planting. There are several methods available to kill off vegetation. The most common method is to apply an herbicide, but there are other non-chemical methods such as solarization and smothering.

Solarization is a simple technique that captures radiant heat energy from the sun and uses that heat to kill seedlings and weed seeds, as well as some soil-borne disease organisms. Sheets of plastic are used to trap the solar heat. Solarization is most commonly used to kill weed seeds in areas where the vegetative layer has been removed.

To smother weeds cover the soil with black plastic or several layers of newspaper. Carpet or boards have also been used for smothering.

Solarization can be combined with other control methods. For example, an herbicide may be used to make the initial kill, then solarize to control subsequent seedlings and kill seeds in the soil. Solarization can also be combined with the application of soil amendments and fertilizers. In fact, solarization can speed up decomposition of organic matter, releasing soluble nutrients into the soil.

Whatever method is used, it is ideal to control perennial weeds before establishing a new garden. It will be much easier to manage them before you have the area planted with vegetables.

**Soil preparation** – Once the vegetation is removed, till the soil to loosen it. This is a good time to add manure or other organic material. To preserve soil structure, avoid tilling when the soil is too wet. To determine if the soil is too moist for tilling, grab a handful of soil and squeeze it slightly. If it sticks together in a ball it is too wet. If it crumbles easily it is ready.

**How to Collect Soil for Testing** – Soil tests should be included as part of garden preparation. It is easier to amend soils and add nutrients before planting, rather than after. Soil tests collect information on soil nutrients and pH.

When collecting soil samples, test areas with drastically different soil conditions separately. To get started you will need a tool for collecting small samples. A soil probe is a great tool for



sampling, if you have one. A shovel or even a small bulb planter can also be used. You will also need a bucket for sampling. You should obtain a representative sample for each area being tested. To do this, collect a number of samples from across the entire area being sampled and combine them into a single, representative sample. Take samples to a depth of six inches. In a large garden, as many as 15 to 20 cores should be taken.

Make sure to use a clean bucket that does not have any cleansers in it. Many cleaners contain chemicals that could alter your soil test results. Mix samples taken from one area together, then fill the sample bag for analysis.

Sample bags are available at your county extension office, where soil samples may also be submitted. The samples are sent to the OSU Soil, Water, and Forage Analytical Laboratory for testing. Tests cost \$10 each and evaluate soil pH, nitrate nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium contents. You can also request micronutrient tests as well as organic matter content and other specific tests. Test results include fertilizer recommendations specific to the type of vegetation growing on the site. Be sure to mark the proper space on the sample label indicating the type of area sampled, such as turf or garden.

Extension Leaflet [L-249](#) contains detailed information on collecting soil samples.

## **Cutting Back Ornamental Grasses**

*David Hillock*

Ornamental grasses should be cut back in late winter before new growth emerges. It can also be done in fall, but the seed heads provide nice winter interest, and some birds will also feed on the seed. To make the job easier, tie up the stalks with string. Depending on the size and density of the grass, the following tools might be used: house scissors, shears or hand pruners, and electric hedge trimmers (for very large clumps). For smaller grasses, trim to about 2 to 3 inches from the ground; for larger grasses cut 6 to 8 inches from the ground. One exception is with the species *Nassella (Stipa) tenuissima*, Mexican Feather Grass, it does not respond well to heavy pruning and prefers to only be cut back by 1/3 to 1/2 its height.

## **Hellebores**

*David Hillock*

Hellebores include some 20 species of herbaceous perennials belonging to the genus *Helleborus*. Many hellebores are evergreen. The plants have beautiful dark green, leathery foliage year round and a winter flowering habit. The exact flowering time is variable by species, and has given us the common names used for this group, which includes Christmas Rose (*Helleborus niger*) for those species flowering near the Christmas season, and Lenten Rose (*Helleborus orientalis*) for the late winter, early spring bloomers. The flowers are indeed rose-like in appearance and nod toward the ground; however, recent breeding work has lifted the flowers more upright so we can appreciate them more when in flower.

The plants can readily seed and each spring you may find many seedlings near the base of your mature hellebores. However, most of the seedlings are out-competed for light and water by the parent plant, as such, hellebores do not become weedy. If you wish to multiply the plant it is best to transplant seedlings away from the parent plant where they will not be shaded or smothered by the heavy foliage.

Hellebores, in general, require little care. They do well in the shade garden, prefer slightly alkaline soil, and only need a little pruning in early spring to remove old tattered leaves. Hellebores are also unpalatable to deer, rabbits, gophers and moles.