



THE NEW HORT THYMES

Serving Cleveland County, Oklahoma with the most up to date gardening, lawn, landscaping, and horticulture information.

Cleveland County Extension Office

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Groundhog Day

The secret first day of garden season (kind of)

When I was a beginning gardener, there was one winter day that I counted down to – Groundhog Day. While there are still many cold, blustery days ahead, I was told that Groundhog Day was when you could plant radish seeds. I don't even like radishes, but you better believe I was out there planting my seeds in little, overcrowded rows, patiently waiting to see the green tops break through the soil. Radishes are a quick harvest – only four weeks after planting, we'd be overloaded with the rounded red roots. By then it was March and the garden was really coming alive.

After a few more years of horticulture experience, I learned that radishes need soil temperatures of at least 45°F to germinate. The forecast should be checked before planting, rather than depending on a date, because we probably won't see these temperatures until closer to the end of the month. That being said, I still get excited when February 2nd rolls around. I've always seen it as the secret first day of garden season.

- Courtney DeKalb-Myers

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Soil Tests for Soil Success

Winter garden planning involves plotting out raised beds, researching new varieties for the area, and reading through brightly colored seed catalogs. With the bitter Oklahoma wind encouraging most of us to stay indoors, it's easy to forget that one of the most important preparations can be done now – improving garden soils. So much of garden success begins in the soil. A nurtured garden soil will result in healthier plants, higher yields, and prolific blooms to be enjoyed throughout the season.

The first step in improving garden soil is to know what you're working with. A routine soil test from the local extension office will provide you with the nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and pH of the soil. It will also include fertilizer recommendations based on the results. To take a soil sample, you will need to collect about a pint's worth of soil. Collect 15-20 random cores, six inches down, and mix them together into one composite sample.

Nitrogen is required for green, leafy growth on the plant. It is an essential nutrient for plant growth. Nitrogen is also prone to leaching in the soil and may require multiple applications during a season. Phosphorus is required for root formation and blooming, while potassium is needed for overall plant health and defense against pathogens. Both phosphorus and potassium remain in the soil and should only be added when soil test results show that they're deficient. pH is important because it can limit the nutrient availability when too high or too low. Depending on what is in your garden, the soil pH should be between 6.5 and 7.

Always follow soil test recommendations before applying fertilizer. Excess amounts of nutrients in the soil can cause plants to decline or die altogether. There is no remedy for excess nutrients, other than time.

To purchase fertilizer, look for three numbers to identify the concentration. These three numbers indicate the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium within the fertilizer, in that order. Phosphoric acid is the source of phosphorus and potash is the source of potassium. For example, a 10-20-10 fertilizer will have 10% nitrogen, 20% phosphoric acid, and 10% potash.



Some homeowners prefer to use organic fertilizers. The percentages of common organic fertilizers are listed to the right. Some are available at box stores; others may require a trip to a specialty garden center.

Material	% Nitrogen	% Phosphate	% Potash
Blood Meal	15	1.3	0.7
Bone Meal	4	21	0.02
Compost (Unfortified)	2.5	0.08	1.5
Fish Emulsion	5	0	0
Fish Meal	8	7	0
Greensand	-	1.5	5
Kelp (Seaweed)	1.7	0.8	5

Caring for Cut Flowers This Valentine's Day

Whether it's a bouquet of roses, tulips, or lilies, there's nothing quite as special than receiving a vase of flowers on Valentine's Day. They're fresh, they smell fantastic, and they'll brighten up any room. You want your fresh bouquet to last as long as possible. How? Think about it from the plant's perspective – the stems were cut off from their roots, eliminating the plant's source of nutrients and water. The flowers no longer have these resources supplied through the soil, so we have to provide them.

Cut flowers will quickly wilt if they do not have a source of water. Ensure that all stem ends of the flowers are submerged in water. Consider changing this water every few days. This will prevent bacteria growth that may plug up the water conducting tissue in the stems. The water should be lukewarm; this forces out air bubbles that may have entered the stem. Keep green foliage out of in the water. It will quickly deteriorate and the health of the flowers will decline.

To revitalize the stems, cut an inch of the stem ends under warm water. This will reopen the water conducting tissue in the plants. Consider using a sharp knife to make cuts, rather than scissors. Scissors can smash the water conducting tissue and ultimately limit the stem's uptake ability.

Flowers also need starch and carbohydrates for extended vase life. There are many excellent floral preservatives available, which can be mixed in with the water. Alternatively, a tablespoon of sugar can be added to the vase water. Many tap waters are alkaline and need to be acidified. This can be done with two tablespoons of white vinegar. Giving your flowers a quality vase water and supplying nutrients will prolong the vase life.

When picking out an arrangement, look for flowers that are just beginning to open. These flowers are fresher than their fully open counterparts. With roses, look for tight buds with only a few petals beginning to unfold. When picking stems with multiple blooms, like freesias or gladiolus, make sure the youngest blooms are still closed. As time progresses, these flowers will continue to open before declining.

Avoid placing the flowers next to your fruit bowl. Fruits emit ethylene gas, which is the ripening hormone in plants. A very small amount will cause your stems to prematurely decline. To prevent this issue in confined spaces, provide proper air circulation for dilution of the gas. Flowers that are particularly sensitive to ethylene include alstroemerias, anemones, dianthus, freesia, lilies, and roses.

Taking the extra steps to extend vase life will allow you to enjoy that beautiful, fresh bouquet for as long as possible. To learn more about cut flowers, see the Oklahoma State fact sheet [HLA-6426](#).

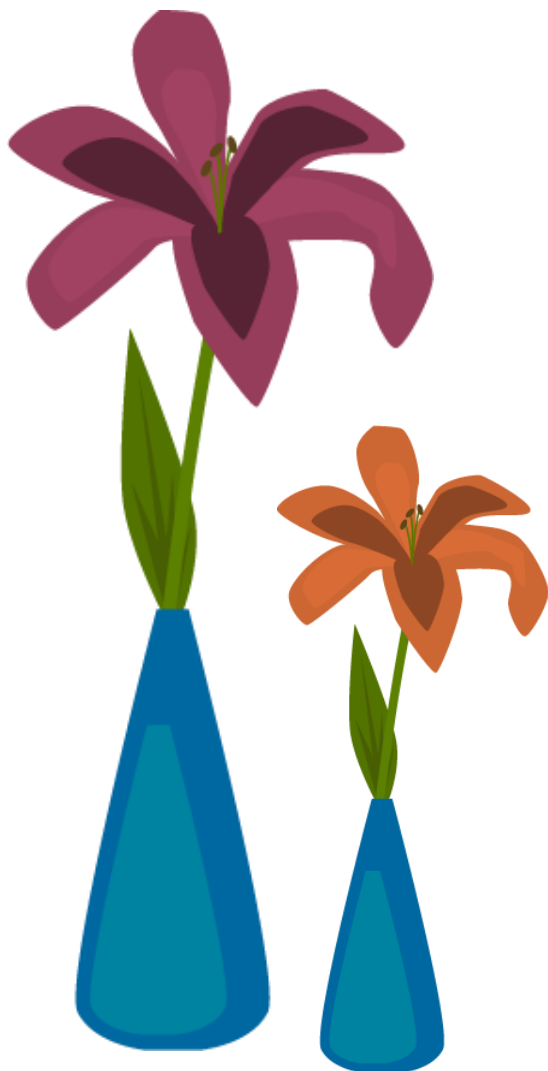




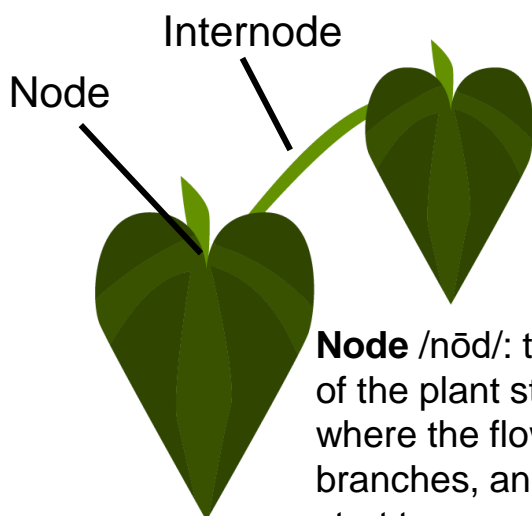
Photo courtesy of Barbara H. Smith, Clemson Extension

February Plant of the Month: Heart Leaf Philodendron

This February, brighten your home with a heart-shaped houseplant

Heart-leaf philodendrons, specifically *Philodendron scandens* subsp. *oxycardium*, have been a staple houseplant for decades. With houseplants becoming more popular, the classic heart leaf philodendron is coming back into popularity. For a good reason too – these plants are incredibly easy to grow. Heart leaf philodendrons prefer indirect sunlight; direct sunlight can cause leaf burn. Regular watering is required, but do not keep the soil constantly wet. This could cause root rot to develop. When kept in the right conditions, heart leaf philodendrons will grow rapidly and begin to vine. For an interesting take on the classic houseplant, consider giving it a trellis to climb.

Not only are heart leaf philodendrons easy to grow, they're also easy to propagate. Simply pinch off the end of a growing point, making sure it has about three to four leaves. Strip the leaves from the node furthest from the growing point and place it into a glass of water. Make sure that the other leaves are not touching the water; they will rot and cause the cutting to decline. Over the next few days, roots will begin to grow from the node. This newly rooted cutting can then be planted in potting soil to create a new plant.



Node /nōd/: the part of the plant stem where the flowers, branches, and leaves start to grow

Garden Tips for February

- Keep all plants watered during dry conditions, even if dormant
- Thoroughly water plantings at least 24 hours before a hard freeze, if the soil is dry
- Plant bare rooted trees and shrubs
- Fertilize fruit trees, nut trees, and shrubs
- Finish pruning shade trees, summer flowering shrubs, and hedges; wait until after flowering for spring blooming shrubs
- Prune fruit trees
- Begin planting perennial garden crops later in the month; this includes blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, grapes, and asparagus
- Fertilize tulips in early February
- Start vegetable transplants
- Plant cool-season vegetables like cabbage, carrots, lettuce, peas, and potatoes
- Continue mowing cool-season lawns (fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and perennial ryegrass)
- Control broadleaf weeds in well-established lawns with post-emergent herbicides
- Control summer weeds with a pre-emergent herbicide in well-established lawns
- Get a soil test and amend garden soil as needed
- Provide feed and unfrozen water for birds
- Clean up birdhouses before spring tenants arrive
- Avoid salting sidewalks as it can damage plant material; use alternative products like sand or kitty litter for traction
- Make structural improvements to the garden and landscape

Eat Seasonally

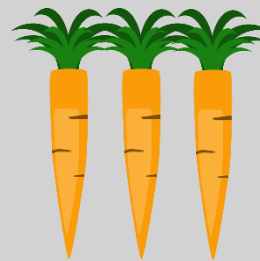
In-season produce is fresher, cheaper, more nutritious, and better for the environment. These are some of the seasonal crops for February:

Avocado



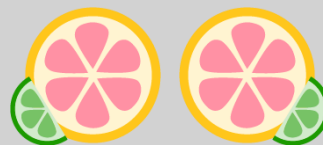
Broccoli

Cabbage



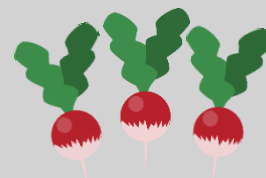
Carrots

Cauliflower



Citrus

Lettuce



Radishes

Spinach



Upcoming Events

February 9, 10:00am to 11:30am – Roses: From Purchasing to Planting

Cleveland County OSU Extension Office, Classroom “C”, 601 E. Robinson St., Norman, OK 73071

Site selection and soil preparation are important factors in planting rose bushes, but there are even greater questions. Is it better to plant bare root or potted roses? Should you purchase locally, order from a catalog, or grab a rose from the big box store parking lot? And what type of rose will grow best in a given area of your landscape? Master Gardener Cathy Bowden, who tends the rose bed in the Demo Garden, will take you from purchase to planting. A Master Gardener since 2011, she has more than 40 years of experience growing roses in areas from desert to tropical.

This class is free and no reservations are required.

February 27, 6:30pm to 8:00pm – Step by Step Seed Starting

Cleveland County OSU Extension Office, Classroom “C”, 601 E. Robinson St., Norman, OK 73071

Garden season is around the corner and it's time to get the transplants started. Not sure how to get started? Cleveland County Horticulture Educator, Courtney DeKalb-Myers, will take you step by step through growing healthy transplants. Participants will get to seed out their own tray and take them home.

This workshop is \$15; pre-registration is required by February 22. To register, contact the extension office at 405-321-4774. Space is limited.

March 23, 10:00am to 11:30am – Including Vegetables in Your Landscape

Cleveland County OSU Extension Office, Classroom “C”, 601 E. Robinson St., Norman, OK 73071

Have limited space in your yard, but still want to grow vegetables? Include them in your landscaping! Master Gardener Kay Holder will explain how you can have beauty and edible food in one landscape. Square foot gardening techniques will also be discussed.

This class is free and no reservations are required.

About the editor...

Courtney DeKalb-Myers has been the Cleveland County horticulture educator since August 2018. Her position handles homeowner inquiries, master gardener advisement, and other horticulture education programming throughout the state. She is originally from Norman, Oklahoma and developed a passion for gardening at a young age. She went onto study horticulture at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater with an emphasis in entrepreneurship. After graduating from OSU, she moved to Raleigh, North Carolina to attend NC State for graduate school. Her research was heavily focused on vegetable production, specifically processing tomatoes for a local salsa product. The emphasis on local products motivated her to move back to Oklahoma and she is so excited to now serve the town that raised her.

