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THE NEW HORT THYMES

**CLEVELAND COUNTY
EXTENSION**

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



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Saying Goodbye To Summer

We must bid farewell as the weather cools off

The weather the past few weeks has been gorgeous in central Oklahoma! The air is warm, but the cool breeze indicates the coming season change. It is this time of year where we must say goodbye to summer and welcome in fall.

Fall brings in it's own wonderful garden activities. Pumpkins and potted mums begin to adorn doorsteps. Pansies and ornamental cabbages replace our summer annual plants. If you planted a fall garden a few months ago, you're most likely harvesting the final crop of warm season vegetables and beginning to enjoy cool season greens. Lawns should be mowed and edged neatly before the first killing frost. Now is also a time where we look forward to next year. Spring flowering bulbs can be planted now until the middle of November. These will add a much-needed pop of color early next spring. Consider planting them in with the pansies for an especially stunning display.

(Not So) Spooky Spiders

October is here and so is the beginning of the spooky Halloween season. Decorations for the season include ghosts, witches, and a little critter that is familiar to gardeners – spiders. Many people have some level of arachnophobia, but taking the time to learn about these misunderstood creatures can subdue the fears. Spiders have an important role in the ecosystem. They consume many insects and keep pest populations in check. They can actually be a great help if we let them do what they're meant to do. The only Oklahoma spiders that are harmful to humans are the black widow and the brown recluse. Other spider species do not present a threat and can be left alone. Below are some of the spiders that may be encountered while working in the garden.

One familiar garden spider is the **orb-weaver**. They're also sometimes called the black and yellow garden spider or zipper spider. These are easily recognized by the striking coloration on their abdomen. Webs are wheel shaped with a distinct zipper down the middle. These spiders catch many pests when left in the garden. Orb spiders are capable of eating prey up to twice their size. They're not harmful to humans, but it's best to leave them alone and let them do their job. Orb-weavers tend to stay in one spot if left undisturbed and receiving plenty of food.



Photo from Becca MacDonald, Sault College



Photo from Lesley Ingram, Bugwood.org

Another frequently encountered spider is the **wolf spider**. Wolf spiders are aptly named – they hunt at night and pounce on their prey. Their diet consists largely of crickets and grasshoppers. They're solitary hunters and do not spin webs. Wolf spiders can sneak into the home through cracks and crevices. They're especially prone to home invading in the winter and may be found around doors, near baseboards, and in garages. Wolf spiders are not poisonous, but a bite may cause reactions in some individuals.

Jumping spiders are another group of Oklahoma spiders. There are many different shapes, sizes, and colors of jumping spiders, but they all have excellent eyesight to stalk their prey. Jumping spiders are bold and stocky in appearance. They can be found around gardens and in the home. Jumping spiders can travel by "ballooning", where they release a small amount of webbing that catches the wind. This can carry them over much larger distances. Jumping spiders are not harmful to humans.



Photo from Joseph Berger, Bugwood.org

Harvesting and Preserving Herbs

Herbs are an excellent addition to any garden. They're easy to grow with few pest problems. Seasoned gardeners are accustomed to adding fresh herbs to their meals to create robust, unique flavors. As the growing season comes to an end, preserving herbs can be a way to bring that flavor into the winter season.

Before herbs can be preserved, they need to be harvested in a way that maximizes flavor. Harvest in the morning while the temperatures are still cool. There are more flavor-inducing oils at this time. It's also best to make sure that the herbs are not flowering. Pinching off flower buds encourages the plant to put more energy into its foliage. Use sharp scissors or clippers to harvest herbs. This creates a clean wound that is easy for the plant to heal. After harvesting, gently rinse herbs with cool water and pat dry. When herbs have completely dried, they are ready for preservation.



Herb Preservation Techniques



Drying

To dry herbs, tie them in bunches and hang upside down. This needs to be done in a dry, well-ventilated area. Herbs will be crackly crisp to the touch when they are completely dry. This will take about two weeks for most herbs. If there are concerns about dust or insects, a paper bag can be placed over hanging herbs. This will add additional drying time though. Dried herbs should be stored in tightly closed jars.

Photo from University of Illinois Extension



Freezing

Some herbs lose their flavor when dried, so freezing is the preferred preservation technique. This is true for cilantro, chives, and mint. Chop herbs and pack them into ice cube trays. Pour water or oil over the packed herbs and place in freezer. After the liquid freezes, pop ice cubes out and place in freezer bags for storage. This can be an easy way to add flavor to sauces, soups, or glasses of iced tea.

Photo from The Ohio State University



Vinegars & Oils

Herbal vinegars and herb-infused oils are excellent ways to perk up salad dressings, marinades, and sauces. To make vinegars, heat the vinegar until it is warm. Bruise the herbs and place them in a jar. Pour warm vinegar over the herbs and steep for two weeks in a sunny location. Herb-infused oils are made similarly, but they need to be refrigerated to prevent the development of bacteria. Use oils promptly.

Photo from Colorado State University



October Plant of the Month: Pansies

Spectacular blooms to get you through the cooler months

Pansies are prolific bloomers, easy to grow, and can withstand the Oklahoma winters. It's no wonder they're one of the most popular flowers. Pansies prefer full to partial sun and cool temperatures. Early to mid-fall is the best time to plant pansies. This gives them time to become established before the cold weather. Pansies fill the void of summer annual color and last into late spring. As summer temperatures warm up, pansies will stop blooming and become leggy with long internodes. It's best to remove them at this time.

Pansies are available in a wide spectrum of colors. Similar to pansies are violas, also known as Johnny jump-ups. These have similar growing requirements to pansies. Mixing multiple colors of pansies and violas can create a stunning display that will last until the next season.



Internode: a part of a plant stem between two of the nodes from which leaves emerge

Garden Tips for October

- Begin planting spring-flowering bulbs like tulips, hyacinths, crocus, and daffodils
- Plant cool-season annuals like pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, and snapdragons when temperatures begin to cool
- Spring-flowering perennials should be divided or planted now
- Mulch around perennials to increase overwintering chances
- Purchase trees from nurseries and garden centers at this time to select for the fall color you prefer
- Many perennials can be planted at this time and are easier to establish
- Dig sweet potatoes and harvest winter squash before frost
- Consider building a cold frame to protect cool-season crops for production during the winter
- Remove all debris from the garden to prevent overwinter of various garden pests
- Cool-season lawns like fescue can be established now
- Consider planting a cover crop in the vegetable garden
- Broadleaf weeds like dandelion can be controlled during October
- Mow and neatly edge warm-season lawns before killing frost
- Bring tropicals and tender perennials inside before temperatures drop too low
- Consider creating a compost pile; the abundance of leaves and other garden debris can make great start
- Preserve herbs for fresh flavor throughout the winter

Eat Seasonally

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

Apples



Beets

Brussels Sprouts



Cauliflower



Kale



Peas

Pecans



Persimmons

Pumpkins



Upcoming Events

October 7th, 10:00am to 12:00pm – Native Plants for Water Conservation

Native plants are a popular choice for Oklahoma landscapes. They're adapted to Oklahoma's wild weather and can take the heat. Planting natives can reduce the water needs of your landscape and provide beneficial habitat for pollinators. During this free online workshop, learn how to get started on your native plant garden from Courtney DeKalb-Myers, Cleveland County Horticulture Educator.

The workshop is free, but registration is required. To register, visit

<https://www.okc.gov/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/22574/5407?curm=10&cury=2020>

October 14th, 6:30pm to 8:00pm – Garden Assignments for Autumn

The air is warm, but the breeze is cool. Fall is officially here! Wondering what should be done in the garden during this time of year? Join us to discuss selecting cool season annuals, planting spring flowering bulbs, extending the vegetable garden season, and other autumn assignments. If time allows, webinar participants will be invited to share their best fall gardening tips.

The class is free, but registration is required. To register, visit

<https://dasnr.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0uc-GgrTopGNxq2iDUvI2lcvuLcyDWRDn4>

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.

