



April 2020

THE NEW HORT THYMES

**CLEVELAND COUNTY
EXTENSION**

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



Cleveland County Extension Office

Address

601 E Robinson St
Norman, OK 73071

Phone

405-321-4774

Email

courtney.dekalb@okstate.edu

Website

www.oces.okstate.edu/cleveland

Social Media

Facebook:
/clevelandcountyhort
Instagram:
@clevelandcountyhorticulture



Bloom Where You Are Planted

Find peace in gardening during these stressful times

There have been a lot of articles about the resurgence of Victory Gardens since the COVID-19 shifted our day to day life. Food shortage fears have encouraged people to stock up on seeds and gardening supplies. While I am thrilled there's a resurgence in wanting to grow your own produce, I think there's a lesser known benefit to gardening during these times.

I'm a horticulturalist, not a psychologist, so I don't claim to have the best advice for these kinds of situations. That being said, one thing that gives me relief is reminding myself that I have control over my actions. I can get outside, get my hands dirty, and soak up vitamin D. I can lightly prune shrubs, plant perennials, and thin out my lettuce. I am reminded that there are things I can depend on – seeds germinating, plants poking through the ground, and the fact that there will almost always be a late freeze in Oklahoma. These things bring me comfort as we navigate uncomfortable times.

Research proves that gardening is good for mental health. Horticulture activities were included at psychiatric institutions as early as the 1800s and in recent years, the number of horticulture projects for vulnerable people has increased dramatically. If these unprecedented times have you feeling anxious or upset, know that you can find some peace in the garden.

- Courtney DeKalb-Myers

In this issue...

Vegetable Gardens.....	2
Plant of the Month.....	4
Garden Tips.....	5
Seasonal Eats.....	5
Upcoming Events.....	6

How to Start a Home Garden

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and anxiety over food supplies has inspired a lot of first time gardeners. A recent New York Times article compared the resurgence of gardening is to the Victory Gardens of the early 20th century. “Americans were once urged to plant in every patch of available soil – and produced about 40 percent of the nation’s fresh vegetables,” the article reads. If vintage posters of gardeners and overflowing baskets of produce give you inspiration, but you’re not sure how to get started, here are some first steps to take.

1. Site Selection

The ideal site for a vegetable garden has full sun in the morning and the early afternoon. A location with late afternoon shade can be a benefit in the heat of the afternoon, but full sun is required to grow during the other seasons. Typically about eight hours is the minimum for successful production. It’s important to avoid slopes when selecting a site. Slopes can lead to erosion and run off of fertilizers or pesticides. Also make sure that the garden is built away from trees. Competition with tree roots can cause a long term struggle. It’s best to keep the garden outside of at least two times the distance of the tree diameter.



2. Assess the Soil

Soil is a critical component of a successful vegetable garden. Ideally the soil is a loam, sandy loam, or silt loam with 2-3% organic matter. Unfortunately, gardeners frequently encounter less than ideal soils. Soils that have excess clay, poor drainage, or a lot of rocks can make growing vegetables a challenge. If presented with these problems, consider building raised beds or creating a container garden. It is easier to manipulate the soil in these scenarios.

Nutrients present in the soil are also critical for success. The best way to know exactly what’s in the soil is to do a soil test. While the Cleveland County OSU Extension Office is temporarily closed, we do have a drop off location for soil samples. To take a proper sample, dig a 6” core in 15 to 20 random spots throughout the area of interest. Mix the cores together in a clean bucket to create a composite. Place that composite in a quart or gallon sized zip top bag. Samples need to consist of three cups of soil. Soil samples are sent to Oklahoma State’s Soil, Water, and Forage Analysis Lab. It takes about two to three weeks to get results. Fertilizer application recommendations will be made for each sample. This is the best way to know the unique nutrient needs of the garden.



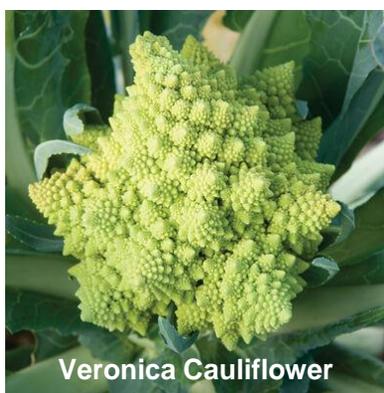
The Cleveland County OSU Extension Office is temporarily closed, but there is a drop off location for soil, water, and forage samples. We are located at 601 E Robinson, Norman, OK 73071. An information form will be provided at the drop box site. We ask that clients attach this form to their sample. Clients will receive an invoice afterwards. The price of a routine sample is \$10.

3. Choosing What To Grow

When starting a garden, it is important to start out small. It's easy to get overly excited and bite off more than you can chew. Also make sure to grow what you'll actually plan to eat. Radishes may be a quick grow, but if you don't like them, devote that space to something you will enjoy eating.

There are a lot of vegetable varieties available and it can be overwhelming to choose the best one for you. OSU Fact Sheet HLA-6032 "Vegetable Varieties for Oklahoma" lists some of the tried and true varieties for the state. All American Selections (<https://all-americanselections.org/>) is another good resource for varieties. When selecting varieties, consider the disease resistance and temperature requirements. This can narrow the search for good varieties.

Don't forget to do some experimentation! It's fun to devote a portion of the garden to new and exciting varieties.



Veronica Cauliflower



Green Zebra Tomatoes



Calliope Eggplants

Photos from Johnny's Selected Seeds

4. Keep Plants Healthy

There's more to gardening than throwing seeds in the ground, sitting back, and waiting for harvest. Plants must be kept healthy and happy between planting and harvesting. Here are some tips to keep plants healthy throughout the growing season:

- Start with strong, healthy transplants
- Stagger plantings for a continual harvest throughout the season
- Use mulches to conserve moisture and control weeds
- Avoid excessive walking and working in the garden when the soil is wet
- Examine garden often to keep ahead of problems
- Side dress fertilizer through the season
- Use drip irrigation to use water efficiently and keep it off the foliage
- Harvest in the morning, when produce has the highest water content



Photo from Minnesota Historical Society

For the full New York Times article, see <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/25/dining/victory-gardens-coronavirus.html>



Photo from Monrovia

April Plant of the Month: Creeping Wire Vine

A groundcover that is as unusual as it is versatile

Creeping wire vine, *Muehlenbeckia axillaris*, is a unique ground cover that creates a spreading mat of wiry stems and fine leaves. Leaves are rounded and with a glossy green appearance. It prefers partial to full sun and well drained soil. It is especially useful in rock gardens, as the plant can creep in and around the rocks. Creeping wire vine is also attractive in pathways or cascading over a wall. The flowers are insignificant, but it can produce attractive white fruits in late summer. Creeping wire vine is a perennial and will retain some of it's foliage during the winter.

While the plant is commonly used as a groundcover, it can add an interesting texture to containers. It's spreading habit makes a good 'spiller' in the thriller-filler-spiller combination. It also does well as a houseplant, if given adequate light exposure.



Spreading /sprediNG/: to extend its surface area, width, or length; when referring to plants, it is in reference to its form

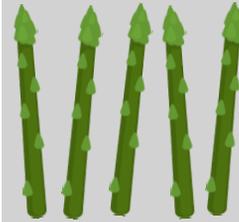
Garden Tips for April

- Thoroughly water newly planted trees and shrubs, as this can make the difference between success and replacement
- Prune out any winter damaged branches or plants
- Prune spring flowering plants, like forsythias, after they are finished blooming
- Ground covers can be pruned back to remove winter injury and clean up plants
- Watch for diseases after a period of warm and humid weather
- Choose compact, bushy plants when buying annuals
- Plant warm season bedding plants after soil temperatures are in the low 60s
- Hold off on mulching garden beds until the spring rains have passed and the soil has warmed up
- Protect warm season vegetables and annuals when temperatures get close to freezing
- Plant vegetable crops in successive plantings to have a steady harvest
- Do not plant cucurbits or okra until early May
- Watch for cutworm damage on vegetable crops
- Fire blight can be controlled at this time; take control measures for susceptible plants
- Hummingbird scouts come around in early April; prepare feeders with one part sugar and one part red food coloring
- Insects will become active again soon – scout frequently for infestations that can be taken care of early
- Warm-season grass lawns can be established in late April
- Begin fertilizing the lawn in April based on soil test recommendations
- Check for the presence of grubs in the lawn

Eat Seasonally

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

Artichoke



Asparagus

Beets



Broccoli

Cauliflower



Lettuce

Peas



Spinach

Swiss Chard



All OSU Extension events in April have been cancelled or postponed.

Check back in May for updates!



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.

