



Horticulture Newsletter

August 18, 2026

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and
Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



When watering the landscape, it is always better to water based on the conditions on your property, rather than by a set schedule. A smart irrigation controller helps to do just that. Smart irrigation controllers increase water efficiency by taking in outside data to make irrigation decisions based on the type of plant being watered, the soil type of the property, and local weather conditions. When paired with rain sensors, soil moisture sensors, solar radiation data, and weather monitors, a smart irrigation controller can become a powerful tool in a healthy and

water-wise landscape. [Watch this week's video covers on how to conserve water with smart controllers,](https://youtu.be/TC2VTo4wA4o?si=TcxIHeQDfv-PkoLM) and learn what this technology can do for you: <https://youtu.be/TC2VTo4wA4o?si=TcxIHeQDfv-PkoLM>

Garden Calendar:

- Plant leafy greens in the fall garden, including lettuce, mustard, Swiss chard, and bok choy.
- Harvest crops on a regular basis for season long production.
- Check plants for insects such as spider mites and aphids.
- Control black spot and other rose diseases.
- Fertilize mums, hardy asters, and other fall blooming perennials.
- Water tall fescue lawns one to two times per week, applying a total of 1 to 1.5 inches of water per week.
- Start planning for fall lawn renovation projects such as aerating, seeding, and fertilizing.
- Prune and shape hedges one final time before winter.
- Avoid fertilizing ornamental trees and shrubs now so they harden off before winter. Instead, plan to fertilize trees and shrubs as fall color begins to develop later this fall.
- Make houseplant cuttings and repot plants before summer sun slips away.

Vegetables:

Planting A Fall Garden To Maximize Vegetable Garden Production:

While tomatoes, okra, peppers, eggplant, sweet potatoes, and many of our vegetable garden crops will continue to grow for several more months, fall is the ideal time to reestablish cool-season crops and leafy greens in the vegetable garden. Fall is an often overlooked opportunity for many of these vegetables, with the potential to develop even larger and better flavored harvests than if planted in the spring. Although the potential of the fall garden is great, the appropriate steps need to be taken in advance to prepare for a fall vegetable garden, starting in the early summer.



When establishing a fall vegetable garden, pay close attention to how long it takes the crop to develop and how tolerant the crop is of first frosts or freezes. On most seed labels this will be indicated by days to maturity. For most fall vegetable garden crops, it is important to allow enough time for crops to mature before the first frost. Although it is difficult to predict an exact date, the average first frost in the fall occurs in mid-October for most of central and eastern Kansas. Further north, frosts may occur a few weeks earlier, while further south may have a few additional weeks before frosts occur.

In order to provide an adequate number of days until maturity, the planting date of crops will vary. Potatoes or cabbage require an extended period of development, thus planting them in mid-July is necessary. Other crops, such as lettuce or radishes, can be planted as late as early September. The later the planting date, the more the temperatures in Kansas begin to cool, and often rainfall becomes more abundant, allowing many leafy greens and cool-season crops to thrive. When to start the fall garden varies greatly depending on the type of crop.

For cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts, plan to plant transplants outdoors in the garden in late July to early August. This requires purchasing transplants from a local garden center or nursery, or beginning your own seeds indoors in early July. Typically seeds are planted 4 to 6 weeks ahead of transplanting time. With Cole crops, be sure to pay special attention to the days to maturity, as not all varieties will have the time necessary to mature before frost.



For beets, daikon radishes, turnips, and carrots, plan to direct seed into the garden from late July to early August. Many turnip varieties have a short growing season and may be direct seeded even into late August to early September. Seeds will require adequate moisture until they emerge, and a light covering of compost over the seeds may help prevent soil crusting and improve germination.

Lettuces can be direct seeded into the garden in late August or started indoors as transplants, 4 to 6 weeks ahead of time. Most lettuce varieties will tolerate a frost down to about 28°F with minimal damage, which helps to extend the growing season.



For spinach, kale, arugula, bok choy, mizuna, and a wide range of leafy greens, most can be direct seeded into the garden in late August to early September, for harvest in October or November. These leafy greens will grow rapidly, especially as soil and air temperatures cool this fall.

Unfortunately, not all spring planted vegetables are a good fit for the fall garden. Planting peas and Irish potatoes should typically be avoided in the fall. Northern Kansas may have more success with fall grown peas and potatoes, however for much of the state, soil temperatures often remain too warm for fall planted peas and potatoes to do well.

Visit the “Fall Gardens” section (Chapter 8) of the [Kansas Garden Guide](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf#page=71) for more information and tips for fall vegetable garden success: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf#page=71

Fruit:

Protecting Grapes From Bird Damage:

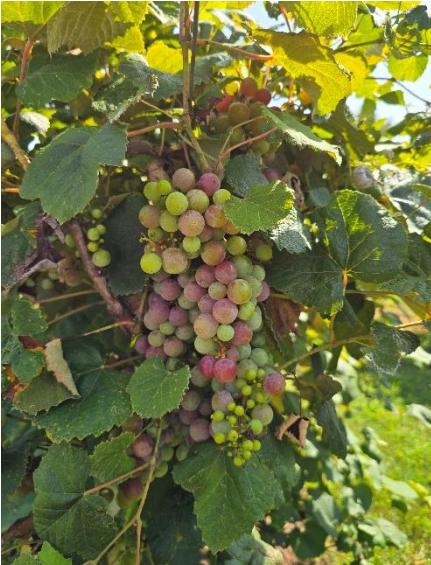
As grapes begin to soften, develop color, and accumulate sugar, birds pose a greater and greater risk of fruit damage. While not all birds will feed on grapes, robins, starlings, and blackbirds commonly create a serious challenge for grape growers in Kansas.

Most feeding activity typically begins when grapes start to develop color and continues until harvest. Damage from bird feeding can occur in one of two ways, either by plucking the entire grape from the cluster, or by pecking holes in the fruit. Both forms of damage decrease yield and fruit quality.

Since bird damage can begin well before grapes reach maturity, bird control efforts should start as soon as grapes begin to change color and before birds establish feeding habits on the plant. One of the most reliable methods for protecting grapes is by using bird netting. Netting serves as a physical barrier installed over the plant or entire vine row and prevents birds from reaching the fruit. When installed correctly, it can dramatically reduce crop losses.

There are many types of netting available, and they vary greatly in cost. Although the initial investment may be significant, quality nets can last three to six years when handled carefully. Bird netting mesh sizes typically range from ½ to ¾ inch mesh, but may be smaller. Lightweight plastic nets can be both inexpensive and effective, however, they may be more difficult to install and remove, and have a shorter lifespan. Woven mesh netting is easier to handle and will last longer, but comes at a higher cost.





For any type of bird netting to be effective, the netting should be secured beneath the vines so birds cannot access grapevines from underneath. Also be sure to tie off netting well at both ends of the row to stop birds from accessing grapes.

Other deterrents, including scare devices, reflective materials, distress calls, and propane cannons, may provide temporary relief of bird damage in grapes, however, birds quickly become accustomed to them. Their effectiveness is improved when devices are moved frequently and when visual and auditory deterrents are used simultaneously. Even then, however, netting remains the most effective solution for limiting bird damage on grapes.

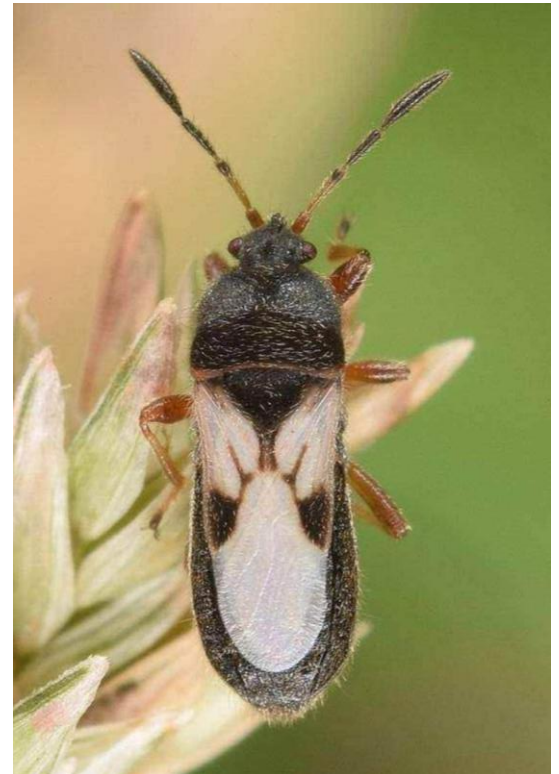
Visit our [Grapes publication](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/grapes_MF635) for more information on bird netting and growing grapes in Kansas: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/grapes_MF635

Turf:

Chinch Bugs - An Insect Pest of Turfgrass:

Chinch bugs are insect pests of turfgrass, with the common chinch bug (*Blissus leucopterus leucopterus*) the main chinch bug species in the Midwest. Chinch bug nymphs and adults feed on zoysiagrass, Bermudagrass, bentgrass, Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, buffalograss, and fescue grasses. This article discusses the biology, damage, and management of chinch bugs.

Biology: The chinch bug life cycle includes an egg, nymphs, and an adult. The life cycle, from egg to adult, can be completed in approximately one month. Adults are 1/8 of an inch (3.1 millimeters) long, black and gray, with white markings on the body (image on the right). After mating, females lay up to 200 eggs over three to five weeks. Nymphs emerge (eclose) from eggs and feed on the leaves (blades) of turfgrass. Young nymphs are red with a yellow band on the front of the body (image below). Older nymphs are black and gray with a white spot on the back. There are five nymphal instars (stages between each molt). After the final instar, chinch bug nymphs become adults, which may live for two to three weeks.



Chinch bugs reside in the thatch layer and areas of the turfgrass that receive full sunlight. Chinch bugs prefer hot and dry conditions because they are susceptible to infection by natural fungi under moist conditions. Chinch bugs overwinter as adults in thatch and debris. There are two generations per year in Kansas.

Damage: Chinch bug nymphs and adults have piercing-sucking mouthparts that are used to remove plant fluids from turfgrass leaves and stems. In addition, they can inject a toxic saliva into plant tissues. Chinch bug feeding results in yellow to brown patches of turfgrass in areas exposed to sunlight (image on the right), which may be misdiagnosed as drought stress or lack of water. Nymphs and adults typically feed on the edge of the yellow or brown patches of turfgrass. Chinch bug adults resemble big eyed bugs, which are predators. Therefore, be sure to accurately determine that chinch bugs are what is causing damage to the turfgrass.



Management: Management of chinch bugs involves 1) regular irrigation of turfgrass, 2) dethatching rhizomatous turfgrasses, such as zoysiagrass and Bermudagrass, 3) regular monitoring, and 4) applying insecticides if needed. Provide enough water to minimize stress to turfgrass and dethatch every year or two years. Monitor for chinch bugs by taking a coffee can open at both ends, insert into the turfgrass at the edge of the damaged area, and fill the can with water. Chinch bug nymphs and adults will float on the water surface. Five to 10 chinch bugs per square foot may result in damage to turfgrass. However, damage can be minimized by providing proper cultural practices, such as watering, fertility, and dethatching.

Liquid or granular formulations of insecticides can be applied to the turfgrass to maintain chinch bug nymph and adult populations below damaging levels. Always read the label of an insecticide and follow directions accordingly. Timing, coverage, and application frequency can influence the effectiveness of insecticides in killing enough chinch bugs to prevent damage to the turfgrass. After application of an insecticide, irrigate with a 1/2 inch (12.7 milliliters) of water to move the insecticide into the thatch layer where chinch bugs are located. Furthermore, when applying liquid formulations of insecticides, ensure that the water pH is between 5.5 and 6.5 to avoid issues with alkaline hydrolysis, which can reduce the effectiveness of the application.

Trees & Shrubs:

Fall Webworms:

Fall webworm nests are a common site in Kansas trees this time of year. The white, web-created nests are positioned out near the ends of tree branches and provide a safe haven from which the fall webworm caterpillars feed. Over time, the size of the web gradually increases, as the need for food increases, bringing more attention to this caterpillar pest.

In Kansas, two types of fall webworms are present, the blackheaded webworms and the redheaded webworms. Although each larvae vary in color, both have many tufts of long hair covering their body. Both types of fall webworm produce two generations per year (often overlapping) and





are present June through September. The first generation of fall webworm each summer is often small and usually goes unnoticed, while the second generation is much larger and more noticeable.

Fall webworm caterpillars feed on almost all fruit, shade, and ornamental trees in Kansas, with the exception of conifers. Often, this insect is present more on trees that stand alone, rather than trees that are surrounded by other trees.

Fall webworm caterpillars feed for four to six weeks from inside the woven silk nests they construct. In addition to numerous caterpillars, tree leaves, caterpillar moltings, and frass also accumulate within the nests. As larvae mature, they crawl down the tree and spend the winter as pupa in the leaf litter under the tree.

High populations of fall webworm can completely defoliate host plants, but typically do not kill them. However, on pecan trees, nut production and quality can be reduced if webworms are not controlled. On ornamental plants, control is optional.

To control fall webworm, prune out and destroy the infested portions of the branch. This is most effective when webs are still small.

If webs are too high to prune out, caterpillars can also be removed by using a long stick or pole with a nail inserted through the end crosswise to snag individual webs and pull them down. Insert the pole into the web and twist to cause the web to wrap around the pole where it can be removed and destroyed.



Insecticides can also be used for control, but a commercial quality, high-pressure sprayer is needed to penetrate through the webs and reach the caterpillars inside. In most cases insecticides are not warranted, as fall webworm damage is primarily aesthetic, and control is not necessary to protect the health of the tree. If insecticides are used, look for products with the active ingredients spinosad, cyfluthrin, or permethrin.

[Visit our Fall Webworm fact sheet](https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Fall%20Webworm.pdf) for more information on this caterpillar pest and its control: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/horticulture-resource-center/common-pest-problems/documents/Fall%20Webworm.pdf>

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