Horticulture Newsletter

November 17, 2026

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Horticulture and Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



In preparing the lawn for winter, homeowners often deal with fallen leaves, fertilizers, weed control products, and more. It is important that these products and other lawn debris are returned to the lawn, rather than being left on the surrounding paved surfaces. This week's video covers healthy lawn care practices, and the important steps that you can take around your lawn now, and throughout the growing season, to help protect our environment: https://youtu.be/VNDNTaP49_o?si=d12jZjQmg8EWRDP2

Announcements:

December K-State Garden Hour:

As we place the garden to bed for the winter months, it is important to also take time to give our gardening tools the care they need for winter. Sharpening, cleaning, sanitizing, and winterizing garden equipment now, can help to have our tools in the best shape possible for the next gardening season. Join us on Wednesday, December 2, 2026, for the next K-State Garden Hour webinar on "Spiff, Sharpen, and Stow - Wintering Garden Tools". The presentation will be live from Noon to 1pm. Discover the best ways to winterize your lawn mower, garden tools, and patio planters for the next growing season. Register to join us live, or view the recording afterwards online at: www.ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour



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Attend The Kansas Turf & Landscape Conference:

Make plans to attend the 76th annual Kansas Turf & Landscape Conference hosted in Manhattan, Kansas on December 2 & 3, 2026. This multiday conference brings together the horticulture industry from across Kansas for networking, professional development, trade shows, and updates on horticulture research across the region.



There are many great presentations scheduled for this two day event, and attendees have the opportunity to earn continuing education credits for many horticulture industry licenses, including:

- Kansas Dept. Of Ag Commercial Pesticide Applicator Recertification Credit Hours (1 Core Hour, 12 hours 3A, and 11 hours 3B credits available)
- Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) education points
- International Society of Arboriculture CEUs

Join us at the Hilton Garden Inn (410 S. 3rd St., Manhattan, KS) for this outstanding conference. Find the full conference schedule, get exhibitor information and register online at: https://www.kansasturfgrassfoundation.com/ Registration closes on November 18th, so be sure to register today!

Garden Calendar:

- Clean & remove fallen fruit from around the base of trees to reduce insect & disease pressure next year.
- Add organic matter to improve garden soil, incorporating in soil amendments if needed.
- Remove frost-killed annuals.
- Depending on your gardening style, leave or cut back perennial stalks to 4 to 6 inches.
- Apply a winter mulch to perennials and roses after several hard freezes. Cut back tall rose canes to 24 inches to prevent winter wind breakage.
- If needed, water lawns so turfgrass starts winter with ample moisture.
- Water newly planted trees and shrubs.
- Rake leaves and place them into a compost pile.
- Drain garden hoses and sprinklers and store indoors for increased life. If you decide to leave them outside, unscrew them from the faucets.
- Clean and oil garden tools, sprayers, and other equipment. Store them for winter.
- If fuel is to remain in power equipment, add fuel stabilizer. Otherwise, drain gas from power equipment for winter storage. Make any needed repairs.

Vegetables:

Season Extension In The Vegetable Garden:



Numerous growing techniques can help provide fresh produce well beyond the normal growing season. From garden site selection to the crop cultivars chosen, many factors can encourage nearly year-round production in the vegetable garden. Whether you are trying to grow produce later in the fall or start growing vegetables earlier in the spring, one of the most successful ways to extend the growing season is by using structures that provide weather protection.
Below are five of the most common season extension structures used in Kansas:

- Row Covers: A fabric made of spun-bonded polyester or polypropylene fabric that comes in various thicknesses. The thickness of the fabric depends on its intended use, and the degree of frost protection desired. When placed over plants, and pinned down to the ground around the edges, row covers can be used to provide short-term frost protection or longer-term protection for overwintering crops such as spinach or strawberries.
- Cold Frames & Hot Beds: A low, wooden box or frame with a clear cover (often glass, polycarbonate, or polyethylene film) that sits in the soil over garden plants. The transparent lid traps solar energy, heating the air inside the cold frame. Adding an active heat source (such as a heater or compost) inside the cold frame transforms it into a hot frame. Cold frames are most commonly used for winter production of cold tolerant greens, late fall and early spring production of cool-season crops, and to harden off transplants before spring planting.
- Cloches & Hot Caps: Individual plant covers that create a warm, humid microclimate underneath. Often made of paper, plastic, or glass, these devices heat up rapidly on sunny days and need careful ventilation to prevent overheating the plants within. Cloches and hot caps are most commonly used for protecting transplants from cold weather early in the season.
- Low Tunnels: These hoop-supported row covers create a tunnel for plant growth that is too low to walk inside of. Hoops are often made of bent wire, PVC, galvanized electrical conduit, or other inexpensive materials, and covered with a polyethylene film or floating row cover. These structures trap heat and insulate cool season crops in the spring and fall, but can be used year-round using various row cover materials.
- High Tunnels & Polytunnels: Constructed similarly to low tunnels, these structures have hoops that are high enough to walk underneath. Similar in appearance to a greenhouse, these structures are unheated and often used in year-round production of in-ground crops.



Visit chapter 9 of the Kansas Garden Guide for more information on each of these structures and other season extension techniques common in Kansas: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf#page=77

Flowers:

Winterizing Roses:



The Thanksgiving holiday is the typical deadline we use as a reminder to protect our garden roses from winter damage. While roses are a tough plant, they often benefit from additional winter protection and care. This additional protection is especially important because most roses are grafted, meaning the root stock and the above ground portion of the rose, are two different plants that have been grown together. It is critical that we protect roses above this graft union (crown), which is usually at or slightly above soil level, in order to maintain the beautiful colors, fragrance, disease tolerance, or other desirable characteristics of the rose cultivar.

Begin winterizing roses by clearing the area of fallen leaves and plant debris. This fallen plant material is an important way insect and disease activity overwinters and reinfects the roses next spring. Eliminating plant debris will help limit the disease pressure next growing season.

Next, mound soil or compost up 8-10 inches high over the graft union of the plant. This protective layer serves two important purposes. First and foremost, it insulates the graft area from winter injury, protecting the stems from dieback due to cold temperatures. Second, these mounds prevent roses from beginning to grow too early in the spring, when the plant experiences warm winter days that would stimulate growth before the cold weather is past.

Avoid using soil immediately around plants when creating soil mounds, as digging nearby may damage rose roots. Instead, bring in soil from another part of the garden or from the compost bin.



Soil mounds should be created after the rose experiences two to three hard freezes and begins to enter dormancy. While this process should normally be completed by Thanksgiving, in unseasonably warm falls such as this year however, this process may need to be delayed until consistently colder temperatures arrive. It is important that roses undergo several freezes to initiate dormancy before soil is added to the crown. If covered too early, the buried canes may remain warm and moist, creating favorable conditions for cane diseases such as canker.

After the soil mound is created over the rose crown, wait several weeks until the soil freezes. Once the ground is frozen, add an additional 4 inch layer of mulch on top of the soil mound for additional winter protection. Wood mulch, straw, or leaves all work well for this additional layer of insulation. If lightweight mulches are used, additional soil can be added on top of the mulch to prevent the mulch from being blown away over the winter months.

While the layer of mulch insulation can be added before the ground freezes, delaying this application until after the soil has frozen is recommended to minimize rodent damage. Mulch applied too early can provide an attractive winter home for mice and other rodents, sheltering them as they feed on rose canes.

Both the mulch and soil layers should be removed from the rose before growth begins next spring. It is important to remove the soil and mulch from the area, in order to prevent the soil level from changing from year to year, and roots becoming buried too deep underground.



Pruning should be kept to a minimum in the fall but may be necessary to prevent wind damage. Strong winds can break individual canes, damage the plant's crown, or blow the plant sideways, damaging its roots and loosening the plant from the soil. If large rose bushes are planted in areas that receive strong winter winds, cut rose canes down to 36 inches in height, and tie canes together. More extensive rose pruning should be saved until late next spring.

Most hybrid tea, climbing roses, grandiflora, floribunda, and miniature roses will need this type of winter protection, as they are generally grafted roses. Not all roses, however, will need this level of winter care. Roses that are not grafted, also called own-root roses or one-root roses, do not have a graft union to protect, and as a result, may require less protection. Many of the popular shrub roses, such as the Knockout, Drift, Buck and Oso Easy series, are own-root roses, and do not need the crowns covered in mulch. If own-root roses suffer winter injury, and die down to the root level, the plant survives as the new growth that returns from the root will be the same as before.

Turf:

Managing Fallen Tree Leaves:

Every fall, an abundance of fallen leaves can create a maintenance headache in the landscape. Allowing too many leaves to accumulate on the lawn can smother out the turfgrass or prevent the turf from photosynthesizing, resulting in a lack of enough stored energy to survive winter. At the same time, bagging up leaves and putting them out for the trash collector is not the answer either. Fallen leaves are as valuable as gold for the health of the landscape, but only if we manage them appropriately.



Here are six ways to manage fallen leaves more effectively, in order to benefit your landscape:

1) Mulch Leaves Into The Lawn: Often the easiest way to manage fallen leaves is to mow them over with a mulching mower, until the leaves are shredded into small enough pieces that they filter down into the turf canopy. Do not bag them, just let them fall back to the turf. This method may take multiple passes over the lawn with the mower to chop up accumulating leaves. More frequent mowings can also help to keep up with the leaf drop. Consider mowing when grass is still visible peeking through the fallen leaves. Not only does leaf mulch add organic matter content to boost soil health, but it also helps to prevent weeds from germinating between grass plants, without negatively affecting turf quality, color, thatch thickness, or soil pH.

2) Create A Compost Pile: Leaves can quickly become rich garden soil when transformed through the process of composting. Shredding leaves before adding them to the compost pile helps create a finished product more quickly. Leaves provide a source of carbon-rich material needed in compost, often referred to as "browns". Mix 2–3 parts shredded leaves with 1 part green material, such as fresh grass clippings, coffee grounds, weeds, kitchen scraps, or green plant material. Nitrogen fertilizer can also be used as a "green".

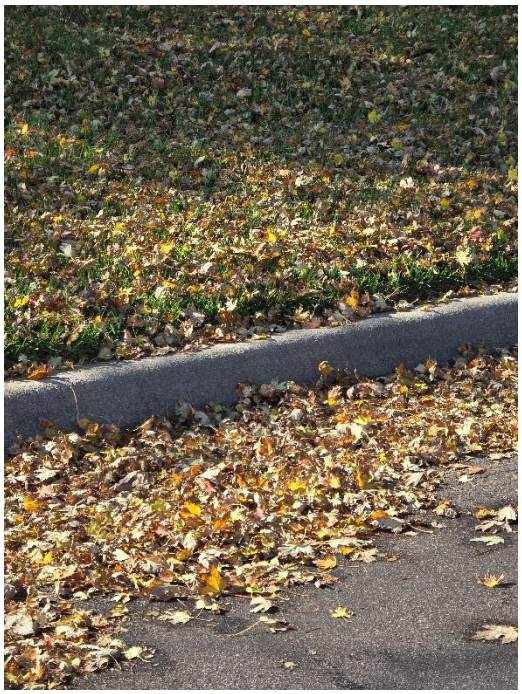


3) Apply Leaves Directly To Your Garden Soil: Leaves can be collected and directly applied to the vegetable garden or annual flower beds for direct incorporation into the soil. Skip the step of the compost pile, and instead apply a 2 to 3 inch layer of leaves on the surface of the soil and then till them in. Using a lawn mower with a bagging attachment to chop and collect the leaves will often be helpful. Repeat the process every couple of weeks until the leaves have all been collected or the weather becomes too cold or the soil becomes too wet. With luck, you should be able to make 3 to 4 applications this fall.

4) Use Leaves As Mulch: Like all forms of organic mulches, shredded leaves can make an excellent mulch. Use a mower to collect and chop leaves, and apply leaf mulch 2–3 inches deep around trees, shrubs, and perennial plants. Be sure to keep leaves several inches away from the trunks of woody plants, and off the plant crowns to prevent excess moisture and rot.

5) Make A Temporary Leaf Enclosure: Temporarily store leaves in a wire ring or fenced in area, to have a steady supply of leaves throughout the year. Leaves may be used after the ground freezes to insulate tender bulbs, roses, and other marginally hardy perennials from winter injury. In early spring, leaves may be used to protect emerging perennial growth from late freezes and rapid temperature changes. Leaves can also be added gradually to the compost pile during the summer months, balancing nitrogen-rich compost "greens".

6) Leave The Leaves That You Can: Although an excessive build up of leaves may prevent sunlight from reaching our plants, a scattering of leaves will not harm the lawn or most plants. Leaves left in the landscape cannot only provide protection for our plants, they can also be an important resource for helping beneficial insects and wildlife overwinter. When managing leaves in the landscape, move leaves from the lawn into shrub borders, woodland edges, or designated naturalized areas where the leaf litter can provide shelter, food, and protection to native pollinators, beneficial insects, and wildlife, such as birds.



At the end of the day, all these practices will help contribute organic matter back into the lawn and landscape, improving soil health. This also keeps leaves out of streets, storm drains, ponds, and streams, where they can contribute excess nutrients to the water.

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Trees & Shrubs:

Pruning Trees and Shrubs in the Fall:



Late season pruning of trees and shrubs can sometimes be problematic in Kansas.

In early fall (August and September), pruning can often stimulate new growth on trees and shrubs. This late season growth is often less reliably winter hardy, and prone to dieback over the winter months. This is especially problematic in evergreens such as boxwood and yew.

In late fall (October and November), pruning can also lead to winter dieback. Although late season pruning does not usually trigger new growth, open wounds are often not allowed sufficient time to heal before being exposed to cold temperatures which may cause damage. This can reduce the overall cold hardiness of trees and shrubs and is especially problematic in plants that are considered marginally hardy.

Late fall is also a critical time of year in which trees and shrubs move sugars and other materials from the leaves into storage areas of the plant. Relocating these products into the roots and woody portions of the plant just prior to leaf drop helps to maximize the plant's stored energy reserves.

Whenever possible, save extensive tree and shrub pruning until late winter to early spring (late February through March and into April) before new growth begins. For spring flowering trees and shrubs, wait until immediately after flowering is complete in the spring. For evergreen trees, such as pines and spruce, consider pruning as new growth develops.



While late winter to early spring is the ideal time to prune most trees and shrubs, light pruning can be conducted at most any time of the year. With light pruning, limit pruning to removing 10% of the overall canopy or less. Deadwood can also be removed from trees and shrubs at any time of year.

Fall Fertilization Of Trees:



Fall is an ideal time to fertilize many types of plants, including trees. While fertilizing a tree may seem like an easy way to encourage healthy growth, fertilizing trees in the landscape may not always be necessary. For trees that grow in a regularly fertilized lawn, they often receive all the nutrients they require from the lawn fertilizations.

Before applying fertilizer, look for signs that nutrients may be limited. Symptoms may include annual shoot growth of less than

6 inches, unusually small leaves, or foliage that has a generally yellow to pale green color. Be aware that drought, compacted soil, root damage, insects, diseases, or improper planting can produce similar symptoms, so a soil test to evaluate available nutrients is always recommended. In most Kansas soils, phosphorus and potassium are present in adequate amounts, and nitrogen is likely low. A soil test will also help to evaluate the soil pH, to see if changes are necessary. Most trees prefer a soil pH of around 6.5, and vary by tree type on their adaptability to pH outside of the 6.0 to 7.0 range.



When fertilizing a tree is warranted, apply fertilizers in the late fall (just as fall color begins to develop) until leaf drop, or in early spring before shoot elongation (before and during crabapple bloom). Avoid fertilizing in mid- to late summer, as new growth may not harden off sufficiently before freezing weather.

Fertilizers should be applied over the tree's root zone, which extends from the trunk out slightly beyond the ends of the branches. For newly planted trees, focus on fertilizing out to the edge of the planting hole.

Use the results of a soil test to determine what type of fertilizer will be most beneficial to your tree. In general, slow-release nitrogen fertilizers will be preferred. Also be sure to avoid "weed-and-feed" products near trees, as the weed control herbicides may cause injury to the tree.

How much fertilizer to apply depends on the size of the tree, and the growth phase it is in. The amount of fertilizer to apply is typically calculated by the diameter of the trunk at breast height (4½ feet above the soil) or by the size of the root zone. Visit our Fertilizing Trees In The Landscape publication for more information on both of these methods, along with other information on when, where, and how to fertilize trees in Kansas: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/fertilizing-trees-in-the-landscape_MF2707.pdf

Miscellaneous:

Remember To Disconnect And Drain Hoses And Irrigation Lines:



With overnight temperatures beginning to drop below freezing in the weather forecast, it is an important time to winterize garden hoses, pipes, and irrigation systems. As water freezes it expands. If there is no room for expansion to occur, the forces of expansion may be strong enough to crack or burst hoses, pipes, valves, fittings and other irrigation components. Take steps now to prevent this damage by properly draining lines and avoid costly repairs.

Start by unhooking hoses from their water source. Fully uncoil and stretch out garden hoses to drain them. Walk along the length of the hose, lifting the hose to drain trapped water. Water will also drain as hoses are pulled toward you for coiling. Store garden hoses in a protected location, out of the sunlight. Over time UV light can make hoses brittle and shorten their



If hoses are left outside and freeze, leave them there and do not move them. Frozen hoses become very brittle and moving them while frozen can damage the hose. Wait until the hoses thaw, then drain and store them.

On water spigots and irrigation systems, look for a main shut-off valve for the system. If equipped with one, close the valve. Open the faucet or run through the irrigation zones to drain off any water or excess pressure.

Most lawn and landscape irrigation systems have shallow lines, and additional steps may be required to drain out water. Some systems may be built with self-draining lines, while others may have manual drains. If manual drains are present, be sure they are opened. Make sure to mark them and set a reminder so they can be closed next spring before the system is pressurized. If there are no manual drains, the irrigation system should be blown out with an air compressor. Many lawn irrigation companies offer this service. If done incorrectly, the pressure may cause damage to the system.

Turn off any automatic irrigation timers. Be sure to drain water from irrigation components installed above ground such as back-flow prevention devices and pipes exposed to freezing temperatures. Further protect above ground pipes by wrapping them for additional insulation.



Remember to also check on winterizing submersible pumps, as most should not stay in water over the winter. Most small pumps will need to be removed from the water and drained. Larger submersible pumps may need to be stored in water in a location that will not freeze. Check with the pump manufacturer for specific directions.

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For questions or additional information, contact: hortsupport@ksu.edu

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