



Horticulture Newsletter

October 20, 2026

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and
Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



Fall is an ideal time to plant new trees and shrubs in the landscape. When planting a new tree, it is important to consider what mature size a tree may reach. This will help inform how close a tree can be planted to a structure, street, or other utilities. While trees may look small when planted, overtime their continued growth may require trees to be removed prematurely if appropriate space is not provided at planting. [This week's video covers considering tree size when planting](https://youtu.be/W2lBzylZ62s?si=Ae8zzxS3PCuvt0QT), and discusses how to identify a tree's mature size and the space that is needed in the landscape: <https://youtu.be/W2lBzylZ62s?si=Ae8zzxS3PCuvt0QT>

Garden Calendar:

- Immediately after a light frost, dig sweet potatoes and cure them for two weeks in a warm location. Then store in a cool, dry location for longer keeping.
- Remove hulls from black walnuts to retain good color of the kernels.
- Trim perennial stalks to tidy the garden for winter.
- Clean up dead iris and peony foliage and destroy it to decrease the spread of disease.
- Control dandelions, henbit, and chickweed with a broadleaf herbicide while seedlings are young.
- Keep fallen leaves from piling up on the lawn to prevent shading and dieback of turfgrass. Mow over fallen leaves with a mulching mower and return chopped up leaves to the soil.
- Enjoy fall leaf color, which normally hits its peak about the third week of October.
- Drain and store garden hoses and sprinklers for winter.
- Place a net over ponds and water features to prevent leaves from falling into the water.

Vegetables:

Cold Hardiness Of Cool-Season Vegetables:

Most of our summer grown vegetables, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, summer squash, beans, and potatoes will be damaged by the onset of our first frost. Other vegetables, however, especially the cool season vegetables planted in the fall and spring, will have more cold tolerance. Cool-season vegetables vary in cold tolerance, with some able to take colder temperatures than others.



Semi-hardy crops can take a light frost and temperatures down to around 28°F before experiencing cold damage. Examples of these semi-hardy vegetable crops include beets, Chinese cabbage, Bibb lettuce, mustard, radishes, Swiss chard, leaf lettuce, and peas. These semi-hardy vegetables should be harvested if temperatures in the mid- to upper 20s are forecasted. Covering these plants when cold weather threatens can help extend the harvest season.

Some of our cool season vegetable crops can tolerate even colder conditions without suffering damage. We call these hardy crops. Hardy vegetable crops can also withstand several frosts but are usually damaged when the temperature drops to the low 20s. These include broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, carrots, turnips, cabbage, kale, collards, spinach, kohlrabi, and onions. These hardy vegetables should be harvested if temperatures in the low 20s are forecasted.



A few fall vegetables improve in flavor after experiencing a light freeze. Brussels sprouts are the most common example. Parsnips and horseradish are also often best after several light to moderate freezes (24-28°F).

Certain root crops can essentially be stored outside, even after the leaves have been damaged or killed by frost. Beets, carrots, potatoes, and turnips can be mulched and harvested as needed until the soil starts to freeze in late November to December.

With all the work that goes into growing fall vegetables, it is important to harvest produce before it is damaged by cold temperatures. Given the right care and proper planning, the vegetable garden can deliver produce from early April (starting with asparagus) to early December most years in Kansas.

Flowers:

Planting Spring-Flowering Bulbs:



Fall is the ideal time to plant spring flowering bulbs. Tulips, daffodils, crocus, alliums, hyacinths, snowdrops, and grape hyacinths, are all common spring flowering bulbs that can thrive as annuals and perennials in Kansas. Part of the reason these bulbs can be so successful is that when planted in the fall, these bulbs have next spring's flowers fully formed within the bulb. These bulbs begin to form roots in the fall once planted and wait until soil temperatures warm up in the spring to produce foliage and flowers.

With next spring's flowers being fully formed within a bulb, purchasing high-quality bulbs is extremely important. Purchase bulbs that are large, firm, and free of rot or decay. Avoid bulbs that are dried, withered, covered in lesions or diseases, or bulbs that have begun to sprout. While larger bulbs come with a higher cost, a larger sized bulb is generally always better. The bigger the bulb, the bigger the flower produced by the bulb. Similarly, the more necks a bulb has, such as a daffodil, the more growing points the plant has, and the more flowers that will follow. While larger bulbs with more necks are met with a higher cost, this expense results in an increased plant performance next spring.

When planting bulbs, soil preparation is an important step to long term bulb success. Most bulbs can grow in a wide range of soils, but generally do not tolerate poorly drained soils. Prepare planting beds by adding organic matter, such as compost or composted manure, and mix this organic matter 4-6 inches deep into the soil.

Fertilizing bulbs can also help the long-term performance and perennialization of bulbs. Fertilizers are most effective when incorporated into the soil before planting. Soil test recommendations will best inform fertilizer selection. Often soil test recommendations show high levels of phosphorous and potassium in Kansas, and recommend fertilizers are high in nitrogen. These would include fertilizer such as a 29-5-4, 21-0-0, or something similar at the rate of 1/2 pound per 100 square feet. In the absence of a soil test, another option for fertilization is to utilize a balanced fertilizer such as 7-8-5 or 10-10-10 at the rate of 2 to 3 pounds per 100 square feet of bed. Mix all amendments thoroughly with the soil before planting the bulbs.





The depth to which bulbs are planted will depend on the size and species of the bulb. In general, the depth to the bottom of the bulb should be about 2 to 3 times the size (height) of the bulb, but check the planting instructions specific to each particular flower.

Water bulbs thoroughly after planting to settle soils, activate fertilizers, and trigger root growth. With most fall planted bulbs (especially daffodils), root formation begins in the fall. As long as the soil temperatures are above 40°F, fall planted bulbs should continue root development. Currently, soil temperatures around the state are averaging 60°F. You can monitor current soil temperatures around the state from the [K-State Mesonet website](https://mesonet.k-state.edu/agriculture/soiltemp/#mtlIndex=6): <https://mesonet.k-state.edu/agriculture/soiltemp/#mtlIndex=6>

Turf:

Preventing Frost Injury On Lawns:

This past week brought frost to much of Kansas for the first time this fall. While frost across the lawn may be beautiful, it can also be a critical time when damage can occur to the lawn. This risk is especially high when walking, driving, or mowing over a frost covered lawn.

As the tiny ice crystals of frost form on the leaf blades of our turfgrass, traffic across the lawn can apply pressure to these ice crystals, which damages the grass. These ice crystals can function as tiny knives that cut into the turfgrass leaf as pressure is applied by the weight of foot traffic or vehicles. As this pressure is applied, sharp ice crystals can kill plant cells as they spear into the leaf.



With this injury to the plant cells, turfgrass leaves can be damaged and turn brown. Footprints left across a frost-covered lawn often show up later in the day. Although the turfgrass can become unsightly, this damage generally does not kill the turfgrass. Individual grass blades that are not dormant may be damaged, but the crown or growing point of the plant is generally not injured.



Actively growing turf will usually recover from frost damage after two to four mowings. At this point in the growing season, however, late season damage will continue to be visible until it is masked by the rest of the lawn turning brown due to cold weather this winter.

To prevent frost damage to lawns this fall, do your best to wait until the frost is gone before walking, driving, or allowing other activity on your lawn this fall.

Trees & Shrubs:

Tips For Fall Tree Planting:

Fall is the ideal time to plant new trees in Kansas. Soil temperatures are still warm, which helps tree roots establish rapidly, and air temperatures begin to cool, which puts less environmental stress on the tree as it works to get established. While these conditions allow fall planted trees to thrive, new trees can often be planted from fall through early spring in Kansas, as long as the ground is not frozen. Tree planting should be completed before mid-May, however, in order to allow trees time to begin establishing before the onset of summer heat.

When planting trees, there is often only one opportunity to do it correctly, which is why extra care and attention to detail should be given to the tree planting process. Below are some of the most important steps to take when planting a tree.



Before planting a tree, [prepare by contacting Kansas 811 \(also known as Dig Safe\)](#) to have utilities in the area identified and marked. This can be done over the phone, online, or through the mobile app. It is important to contact Kansas 811 at least 2 full working days in advance of your tree planting, not including the day of the call, weekends or holidays.

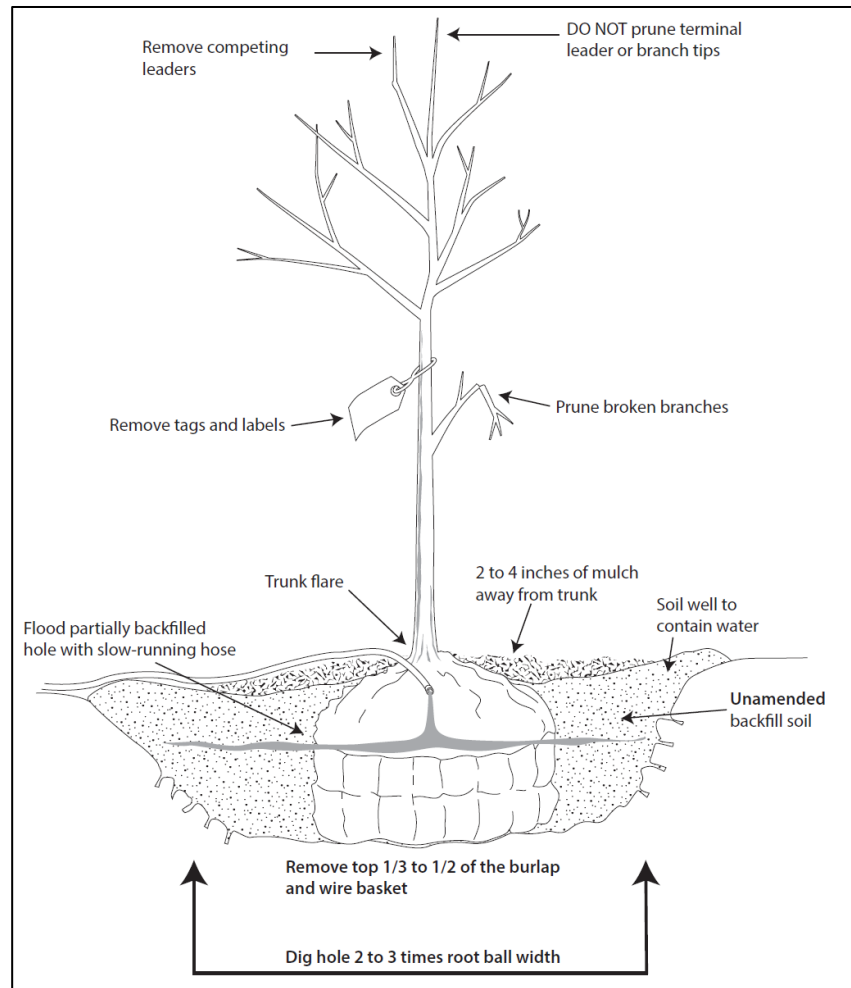
After utilities are marked, it is time to dig the hole. To determine the size of the hole, closely inspect the root ball of the tree. The width of the hole should be two to three times wider than the width of the root ball. The hole should have a saucer shape, with gradually sloping sides. This loosens surrounding soils for root growth and allows tree roots to be laid out into the surrounding soil at planting so they can immediately begin taking advantage of water and nutrients in the surrounding soil.



When determining planting depth, most planting holes need to be much shallower than expected. Determine the tree planting depth by locating the root flare of the tree. The root flare is the portion of the tree where the trunk and the roots come together, and the trunk begins to flare or fan out in diameter. The root flare marks the tree's natural ground level. When planting, position the root flare at or slightly above the final soil grade, ensuring it remains visible once planting is completed. Depending on the tree purchased, the root flare may not be immediately visible when planting. In this case, gently dig down from the top of the pot or root ball in order to identify the location of the root flare. Dig the hole only as deep as the distance from the bottom of the root ball to the root flare. This will often be a very shallow planting hole. Digging a hole deeper than the root flare and backfilling the hole to keep the root flare visible will result in a tree that likely settles over time, burying the root flare.

When the hole is dug, place the tree in the center of the hole. If planting a balled-and-burlapped tree, remove the wire basket and burlap after the tree is situated into the hole. Avoid letting the root ball break apart when handling or planting (note - it may also help to partially remove the bottom of the wire basket before placing the tree in the planting hole; backfill as burlap is removed to further support the root ball). If planting a container grown tree, gently tease apart the root ball with your fingers and lay circling roots out into the surrounding soil of the planting hole. If circling roots cannot be loosened by hand, shave the outer edge of the root ball with a sharp spade or knife to break the circling pattern.

Backfill the hole with soil and water thoroughly to settle the soil after planting. Ensure that the root flare of the tree is visible after tree planting is completed.



A few final tips include:

- Never handle trees by the trunk. Always move trees by handling the root ball to prevent tree injury.
- Build a donut shaped soil ring around the outside of the root ball to hold water and prevent runoff.
- Mulch around trees after planting to boost tree growth and reduce weed competition.
- Stake only if necessary. Wind movement is important in young tree establishment.
- Check soil moisture regularly after planting. This is especially important within the first month after planting. Newly planted trees can benefit from supplemental waterings for 2-3 years after planting to maximize tree growth.

[Visit our How to Plant a Ball-in-Burlap Tree / How to Plant a Container-Grown Tree publication](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/how-to-plant-a-ball-in-burlap-treehow-to-plant-a-container-grown-tree_MF3313) for a full list of step-by-step instructions for tree planting. Following these steps will help to ensure the success of your newly planted tree: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/how-to-plant-a-ball-in-burlap-treehow-to-plant-a-container-grown-tree_MF3313

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

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