Horticulture Newsletter

October 27, 2026

Kansas State University
Horticulture and Natural Resources

A Note From The Editor:

As frosts and freezes bring an end to the outdoor growing season, the pace of gardening naturally slows down in preparation for winter. So too will the frequency of our Horticulture Newsletters this winter. Moving forward, from November through February, look for a new edition of the Horticulture Newsletter on the first and third Tuesdays of each week. We will plan to resume weekly newsletters again in March as we kick off a new gardening season.

With this change in schedule, we hope the additional time will allow us to provide updates and improvements to the KSU Horticulture Resource Center and the other resources we have available. While you may not hear from us every week this winter, know that we will have many more informative newsletter articles ahead. From plant selection to planning your 2027 gardens, be sure to stay tuned for future Horticulture Newsletters in your inbox. Thank you for being a Horticulture Newsletter reader. We value your faithful engagement and constant support. Thank you! - Matthew McKernan

Video of the Week:

Fall is the time of year to plant spring flowering bulbs. From tulips to daffodils, hyacinths to crocus, now is the time to purchase and plant these bulbs for their spring beauty. When selecting bulbs, it is important to start by purchasing high-quality bulbs. Combined with the right planting depth, fertilization, and care, spring flowering bulbs can make a colorful impact next spring. This week's video covers planting bulbs for spring color, and discusses the entire bulb planting process, from selection and purchase through planting, fertilization, and winter care: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLekj8TKhRo

Announcements:

November K-State Garden Hour:

As winter weather sets in, houseplants must be moved indoors and their care adjusted to match indoor

growing conditions. Join us next week, on Wednesday, November 4, 2026, for the next K-State Garden Hour webinar on "Houseplant Propagation And Care". The presentation will be live from Noon to 1pm. Discover how to propagate overgrown houseplants to make their winter care easier, as well as how to optimize indoor growing conditions this winter. Register to join us live, or view the recording afterwards online at: www.ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour

Garden Calendar:

- Harvest peanuts and roast for a homegrown snack.
- Till the garden at the end of the season and add organic matter such as manure or compost to improve the soil structure.
- After a light frost, dig canna, gladiolas, dahlias and other tender bulbs for winter storage.
- Remove dead annuals from the garden.
- Make notes about the garden to document successes and failures.
- Sharpen mower blade for a clean cut.
- Check the soil conditions of trees and shrubs and consider providing a deep watering if necessary before the onset of winter.
- Once the leaves have fallen and plants enter dormancy, transplant trees and shrubs.
- Store unused seeds in a cool, dry location.

Vegetables:

Harvesting The Last Tomatoes of the Season Before Frost:

As the frequency of cool nighttime temperatures increases throughout the month of October, this signals the end of the growing season is drawing near. While a break from the heat and an end to the gardening season may be welcomed by many gardeners, some of our vegetable garden crops may not have finished maturing for the season. For many gardeners, tomato plants may still have fruit developing which are not quite ready for harvest.

For tomato plants that still have unripened fruit that are approaching maturity, there are two options: leave them on the vine until they mature or until a frost is forecasted.

Tomatoes will continue to ripen off the vine, but only if they reach a certain phase of maturity called the 'mature green stage.' To identify if a tomato has reached its mature green stage, look on the bottom side of a green tomato for a white to cream colored, star-shaped marking that originates from the center of the fruit. Tomatoes at this stage are usually at their full-grown size but have not yet developed a pink/red flesh color. If this marking is visible at the blossom end, tomatoes can be harvested before a frost, brought indoors to protect them from cold temperatures, and allowed to finish ripening off the vine.

Inspect tomatoes thoroughly after harvest, keeping only tomatoes that are solid, firm, and free of defects. Discard tomatoes with rots, cracks or breaks in the skin. Prepare tomatoes for storage by removing stems, washing the fruit, and thoroughly drying them.

Next, separate tomatoes into three groups for storage: those that are mostly red, those that are just starting to turn, and those that are still green.

Place the tomatoes on cardboard flats, using layers of newspaper between fruit, especially if stacked. Tomatoes can be stored unwrapped in a single layer or wrapped individually in paper. Occasionally a tomato may start to rot and leak juice, and both the newspaper and cardboard will contain the juice from contacting nearby or underlying fruit.

Store unripened tomatoes at temperatures between 55°F to 60°F, and in areas with moderate humidity and with good air circulation. Tomatoes ripened at temperatures between 60°F and 70°F will ripen faster, however, they will be more prone to decay and develop softer fruit. Light is not necessary for tomatoes to ripen.

Check tomatoes at least twice a week to monitor the ripening. Remove any tomatoes that have begun to decay. When fruit ripen, tomatoes can be moved into cooler storage areas for storage up to one month. Do not store ripened tomatoes below 50°F, as this increases the likelihood of spoilage.

If there are tomatoes on the vine that do not contain the white star markings, these tomatoes can still be harvested, however, they will be unlikely to ripen. Instead, plan to utilize these tomatoes as green tomatoes. Green tomatoes tend to be tart and acidic, but have many culinary uses. Usually they are sautéed, cooked, or fried, and can be included in salads, salsas, and breads.

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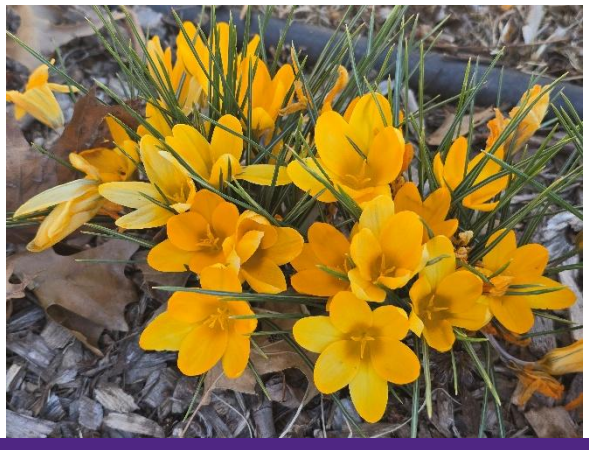
Flowers:

Ten Spring Flowering Bulbs For Kansas:

There are many spring flowering bulbs that can be planted in the fall for their colorful spring blooms. There are pros and cons to each bulb type, so selecting the right bulb is important for success. Here are ten spring flowering bulbs you could consider planting this fall in Kansas:

1. Daffodil (*Narcissus* spp.): Daffodils are among the most dependable spring flowering bulbs for Kansas, as they are long-lived, low-maintenance, and return year after year without the need for frequent division. They tolerate full sun to partial shade and a wide variety of soil conditions. Both deer and rabbits usually avoid them. Daffodils have a variety of heights, bloom times, flower colors (usually yellows, oranges, whites, peaches, and pinks), and have few insect or disease problems. With the right combination of daffodil cultivars, daffodil flowers can bloom from late winter to early summer in Kansas.

2. Tulip (*Tulipa* spp.): Tulips tend to be the most popular spring flowering bulb, as they provide the broadest options of flower colors (every color except blue). They also vary in heights, bloom times, and flower shapes, allowing gardeners to create bold mass plantings and seasonal displays. Tulips are best grown in full sun. Unfortunately, compared to most spring flowering bulbs, many tulip varieties do not perennialize well. Most large-flowered hybrids decline after their first year of flowering and may be better treated as annual plants in Kansas.



3. Hyacinth (*Hyacinthus orientalis*): No spring flowering bulb is more fragrant than the hyacinth. These aromatic flowers bloom in dense spikes of trumpet shaped blossoms, with colors including blue, purple, pink, red, and white. They grow best in full sun and are tolerant of deer and rabbits. Hyacinths are not a good perennializing bulb, as flowering often decreases in quality after the first year, and bulbs may need to be replaced every few years.

4. Crocus (*Crocus* spp.): Crocuses are the spring flowering bulb that provide some of the earliest season color, often flowering in late winter to early spring. They tolerate full sun to partial shade and are deer resistant. Crocuses are low-growing and require little maintenance, making them easy to naturalize into increasingly showy groups over time. Flower colors most commonly include purple, blue, yellow, and white.

5. Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari armeniacum*): Grape hyacinths are durable, low-maintenance, small bulbs that produce compact spikes of fragrant blue flowers in the spring. Flowers are also available in purple, white, pink, and bicolored combinations. Grape hyacinth combine well with other bulbs and tolerate full sun to partial shade conditions. They are attractive to bees, but resistant to deer and rabbit. Grape hyacinth perennialize well, but may not multiply as quickly as crocus or other small bulbs.

6. Allium (*Allium* spp.): Allium bulbs produce one of the most distinctive spring flowers, with a spherical cluster of purple or white flowers. Alliums vary dramatically in height and flower size, depending on cultivar. They tend to bloom later in the season than most spring flowering bulbs (late-spring and early-summer) and are unappealing to deer and rabbit feeding.

7. Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*): Snowdrops, along with crocus, are one of the first spring flowering bulbs to bloom, sometimes emerging through the snow to flower. They tolerate full sun to partial shade, and grow well beneath large, deciduous trees. Although they can naturalize, snowdrops do prefer cooler climates and can be short-lived in periods of heat and drought. Their white flowers and slender leaves are resistant to deer and rabbits.

8. Siberian squill (*Scilla siberica*): An underutilized spring flowering bulb, the Siberian squill is exceptionally tough, cold-hardy, and low-maintenance bulb. In the early spring, plants send up small flower shoots with 1-4 bell-like flowers in a vivid blue to white color. Bulbs perennialize well and are resistant to deer and rabbit activity.

9. Glory-of-the-snow (*Chionodoxa luciliae*): Another underutilized spring flowering bulb, the glory-of-the-snow is an early blooming small bulb. Small, star shaped flowers bloom in colors ranging from soft blue to purplish blue with white centers. It tolerates full sun to partial shade and is resistant to deer and rabbit browsing. Bulbs perennialize readily and are minimal maintenance.

10. Reticulated iris (*Iris reticulata*): Unlike most iris, reticulated iris are planted as a bulb. Fragrant flowers bloom in early spring with blue to dark purple flowers with a gold stripe. Plants reach only a few inches tall and tolerate full sun to partial shade. Plants are also deer and rabbit resistant. Plants do not perennialize consistently well and will grow best in relatively dry soils.

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Turf:

Fall Broadleaf Weed Control:

While many gardening activities wrap up in the late fall and early winter months, this time of year is the ideal time for weed control in the lawn and landscape. While this timing for weed control may surprise many, there are several notable reasons why late October to mid-November is the ideal time for weed control:

- Most winter annual weeds (such as henbit, chickweed, catchy bedstraw, etc.) are starting to germinate and become noticeable. Although fall growth is usually limited, these weeds spend all winter as small plants, waiting for spring weather to trigger rapid growth.
- Many perennial weeds (like dandelion) produce a flush of late summer flowers and seeds. These seeds start to grow in late September and are small and easily controlled now.
- Most perennial weeds and hard to control plants are moving energy from the leaves down into the roots in preparation for winter. This helps the plant prepare for and survive winter, but also helps herbicides control the weed root and all.

All three of these factors make fall the best time to take action to control both perennial broadleaf weeds and young winter annuals. In addition, fall helps avoid unintended drift injury on neighboring plants, as most plants drop their leaves for winter.

While a thick, healthy lawn is the best defense against weeds, often weeds can invade the lawn and landscape despite our best efforts to mow at the proper height, water, fertilize, and aerate correctly. For small areas of weed infestations, hand pulling or mechanical removal can be effective. For large areas or deep rooted weeds, weed control herbicides may be necessary.

For some weeds, herbicides may be the only practical or effective method of control. When selecting an herbicide, check the label to ensure that the product is safe to use in the area you plan to apply it, the specific turf type is listed, and the waiting period before or after reseeding is met. It is also critical to correctly identify the weeds in the area and ensure that weed is listed on the herbicide you plan to apply.

For most broadleaf weeds, combination products that contain 2,4-D, Dicamba, and MCPP will be effective.

As temperatures cool in the fall, consider using products that also contain the active ingredient carfentrazone. Carfentrazone is labeled effective when temperatures dip below 50°F, into temperatures when other products may not be effective.

For some of the most difficult to control weeds, such as wild violets, ground ivy, or thistle, consider if products containing the active ingredient triclopyr could be more effective.

Keep in mind that while summer annual weeds may still be present in the lawn and landscape, our fall weed control efforts are generally not useful against these weeds. Weeds such as crabgrass, goosegrass, grassy sandbur, foxtail, pigweed, and spurge will naturally die off this fall with the freezes and frosts we receive. These plants will come back from seeds next year, so trying to control the mature plants now will have little impact on the populations next year.

Also take caution when using herbicides to control weeds in newly seeded lawns. Most herbicides require newly planted lawns to be mowed at least 2-3 times before most herbicides are safe to apply on grass seedlings. Be sure to read the label carefully before applying any weed control product.

Despite the effectiveness of most weed control herbicides, chemical weed control should be considered an aid to good lawn and landscape management, not a substitute for it. Regular mowing at the proper height controls many kinds of weeds. With good turfgrass management weed problems should be minimal, and herbicide treatments can be limited to problem areas, rather than applied to the entire lawn.

Visit our Weed Control In Home Lawns publication for more information about how to identify and control weeds, while also developing a long term weed management plan: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/weed-control-in-home-lawns_MF2385

Trees & Shrubs:

Protecting Trees & Landscape Plants From Deer Damage:

Seeing increased deer activity this time of year is not an uncommon sight. While watching deer can be an enjoyable occasion, enjoyment quickly turns to concern when the deer sightings occur in the roadways or as damage to our landscapes and crops.

There are several reasons that deer may be brought to your property this fall and winter. Deer breeding season (also called rut) occurs in the fall, and peaks around mid-November. During this time deer focus on breeding, and travel greater distances in order to mate. They also tend to pay less attention to hazards and human activity which may scare off deer at other times of the year. In the fall and winter, food sources also become scarcer as crops are harvested and as fall leaf drop occurs on summer vegetation.

With the possibility of increased deer activity on our properties in the fall, there are two common types of landscape damage caused by deer: antler rubbing and feeding damage.

The most detrimental damage deer often cause is rubbing damage on trees and shrubs. Male deer have scent glands on the top of their heads, which they use during the breeding season to look for mates. Male deer mark their scent by rubbing their scent glands onto trees, posts, and other objects. Unfortunately for the deer, their large antlers usually get in the way, and cause significant damage to plants as they work their antlers around the plant to rub the tops of their heads. Antler rubbing damage typically causes extensive bark damage to the trunk of young/small trees, disrupting the flow of water and nutrients within the tree. This damage usually kills the tree slowly over time and cannot be repaired or undone. In extreme cases of rubbing, the tree may die entirely and require removal. Most antler rubbing damage typically occurs 1.5 to 3.5 feet above the ground, and on tree trunks 4-8 inches in diameter.

Deer feeding damage can also occur to plants over the winter months as well. This type of damage often becomes more intense as the winter progresses but may occur anytime due to limited food availability. Deer can browse on the buds, branches, leaves, and bark of landscape plants, as high as 6 feet from the ground. Evergreens, especially arborvitae, yew, and pines are most at risk, although many deciduous trees and shrubs may serve as a winter food source. This can not only reduce the growth rate of our landscape plants, but sometimes destroy the plant's overall structure.

To deal with rubbing or browsing damage to plants, by far the most effective method of control is prevention. Deer damage prevention can be accomplished in a variety of ways:

- Fencing: By far the most effective way to prevent deer damage is to fence off plants from deer contact. This could be as simple as placing four or more t-posts around a young tree (spaced out no more than 18 inches apart), so deer cannot get their antlers between them. Adding wire panels or woven wire between the t-posts will add additional protection. Keep in mind that deer are strong jumpers, so when fencing off large areas, fencing must be constructed in a way that deer do not just jump over.
- Cage Individual Plants: Similar to a tomato cage, placing a cage built of welded wire or heavy screen can prevent deer from reaching the trunk or foliage. To prevent browsing, cages should have small openings, and be at least 6 to 8 feet tall so that deer cannot reach over and feed.
- Tree Trunk Tubes: To protect from deer rubbing, use tubes that fit over tree trunks, seedling trees, or the entire plant. Tree tubes come in a variety of materials, and are usually a hard plastic, wire cylinders, or mesh. Tree tubes should be at least 4-5 feet tall to protect from rubbing, and cover the trunk from ground level to the first, lowest branches. Cages, fences, and tubes must be securely anchored in place to prevent deer from pushing them aside or lifting them while rubbing their antlers.

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- Repellents: Products used as taste repellents can be effective in discouraging browsing damage in small areas, however they must be frequently applied, especially after every rainfall. Repellents must be applied at the first signs of damage and applied at least once a month (if not more frequently) from fall through late winter.
- Scare Devices: Products designed to scare deer are usually the least effective solution for preventing damage. Typically scare devices only provide a short-term solution until deer discover these devices pose them no harm.

Temporary damage prevention strategies should be taken from September or October through April to help avoid winter deer damage. Be sure to act as soon as deer damage is detected, in order to prevent deer from establishing habits in a new area. While these methods will not likely eliminate deer damage completely, they should help reduce overall damage.

Visit our Deer Damage Control Options publication for more information about preventing deer damage to your trees and shrubs this fall and winter: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/deer-damage-control-options_C728.pdf

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