



Horticulture Newsletter

October 6, 2026

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and
Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



Purchasing plants is far more than just picking healthy leaves or colorful flowers, the roots are a critical part of every plant purchase. This means that in addition to evaluating the above ground portion of the plant, the plant's root system should also be evaluated before purchasing a plant.

[This week's video covers how to check the rootball of a shrub before planting](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-qfEL6f1mw), and includes information on what to look for and how to prepare the root ball for planting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-qfEL6f1mw>

Announcements:

October K-State Garden Hour:

Join us tomorrow (Wednesday, October 7th) for our next K-State Garden Hour webinar on "Groundcovers for Kansas - Covering Your Bases" from Noon to 1pm. Learn how groundcovers can brighten up your landscapes, serve as living mulches, and even act as lawn alternatives. Discover the many groundcover options that Kansas has to offer, and what benefits and challenges each type of groundcover provides. Register to join us live, or view the recording afterwards online at: www.ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour

#KSTATEGARDENHOUR

K-STATE GARDEN HOUR

Groundcovers for Kansas: Covering Your Bases

Wednesday, October 7th 12:00PM -1:00PM CST

Groundcovers can have many uses in the Kansas landscape. From living mulches to lawn alternatives, discover the many groundcover options that can be grown in sun, shade, or the areas in between. Join Kenneth Dodson, Wildcat District Horticulture Agent, as he discusses the many benefits and challenges when converting traditional lawn and landscape areas into groundcover.

Register Here!

Please register for this free Zoom Webinar at:
[ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour](https://www.ksre-learn.com/KStateGardenHour)



Garden Calendar:

- Finalize planting fall cover crops in the garden, such as wheat, winter rye, or tillage radish.
- Continue to harvest apples.

- Plant spring flowering bulbs, such as tulips, daffodils, and crocus, for a splash of early season color.
- Plant pansies, ornamental kale, ornamental cabbage, and other cool-season annuals for fall color.
- Finalize planting all Kentucky Bluegrass seed by early October, in order to allow for seedling establishment before winter.
- Core aerate turf to reduce soil compaction, improve drainage, break up thatch, and help nutrients move into the soil.
- Plant new trees and shrubs and keep them watered during dry winter months.
- Trim dead, broken, or diseased branches from trees and shrubs. Limit heavy structural pruning until late winter to early spring.
- Move houseplants inside for winter before nighttime temperatures drop below 55°F.

Vegetables:

Harvesting Pumpkins And Prolonging Their Lifespan:

Pumpkins that are harvested before they fully ripen will rot more quickly than those harvested at peak maturity. Pumpkins reach maturity when their color is uniform across the entire fruit and the rind is hard. Traditional pumpkin varieties will turn completely orange, but the same applies to other colors of pumpkin as well. Check the rind development by pressing your fingernail into the skin of the pumpkin. A mature pumpkin will have a rind that does not penetrate easily with a fingernail, as mature pumpkins will have a tough, waxy coating which protects them from drying out.



Pumpkins should also make a hollow sound when thumped. In addition, a mature pumpkin will have a stem that does not leak or ooze sap when cut from the vine. Pumpkins that retain a short section of stem are less likely to rot versus a pumpkin without a stem. Make sure to cut the stem cleanly with a sharp knife or pruning shears, leaving at least a 3 to 5 inch stem.

Immediately after harvesting, further toughen the pumpkin rind by storing the fruit in a dry, shaded location with temperatures between 80-85°F for about one to two weeks. This curing process helps to further prolong the life of a pumpkin.

For long term storage of pumpkins, provide a dry location with temperatures between 50°F to 60°F and out of direct sunlight to maintain the pumpkins' bright color. Store pumpkins in a single layer where fruit do not touch one another to reduce the risk of decay.

Carving pumpkins, although a popular fall tradition, will considerably shorten the shelf-life of pumpkins. Expect noticeable rotting to occur within a few days to a week. To extend the life of carved pumpkins be sure to clean the inside thoroughly before carving, removing all seeds and loose string.



After carving, soak the inside of the pumpkin in a 10% bleach-water solution for several hours. Avoid using a real candle inside the pumpkin, since the heat produced by the candle will speed up rotting.

Jack-o-lanterns will also last longest when placed in temperatures between 50°F to 60°F. Pumpkins contain a high concentration of water, so do not allow pumpkins to freeze (temperatures of 32°F or below). Freezing temperatures damage the pumpkin's tissue, and once they thaw, pumpkins will decay quickly. If freezing outdoor temperatures are forecasted, bring your jack-o-lanterns inside overnight.



Flowers:

Clean Up Iris Beds This Fall:



Iris are a popular perennial plant in Kansas, known for their wide variety of colorful springtime flowers. While iris are low maintenance, easy to grow plants with relatively few problems, there are two common issues that affect them. These problems include a fungal disease known as iris leaf spot, and an insect pest known as the iris borer (*Macronoctua onusta*). Though both of these pests are primarily a problem in the spring, now is the time to begin control measures for each.

Both the fungus and eggs of the iris borer overwinter on old, dead leaves. To help reduce pest pressure next spring, act now by removing all dead leaves, and cut back healthy, green leaves by ½ their total height. It will also be beneficial to remove other garden debris from the iris bed at the same time. This can significantly cut down on problems next spring.

Turf:

Why Late Lawn Seedings Often Fail:

We normally recommend that Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue lawns be seeded in September, although the planting window extends from late-August through early-October. As winter approaches, planting conditions become less favorable. With Kentucky bluegrass lawns, seeding should be done by October 1. For tall fescue lawns, we recommend seeding no later than October 15. Though plantings later than October 15 can be successful, the odds of success diminish as more and more time passes.

The first challenge with late season plantings are the cool temperatures. Cool season turfgrasses produce the best shoot growth when air temperatures are 65°F to 75°F. Root growth in these grasses is best under slightly cooler conditions, when soil temperatures are between 55°F to 65°F. As fall progresses, both air and soil temperatures will continue to drop. Currently for most of Kansas, 2" soil temperatures are averaging upper 60s to low 70s across the state.



Shortening daylength also creates a challenge for turfgrass seedlings. With less sunlight each day, seedlings have less opportunity to photosynthesize. Less photosynthesis means that seedlings are producing less energy (in the form of glucose), and less energy means less resources for seedling growth, development, and winter preparation.

Although cooler temperatures and shorter days may increase the number of days required for seed germination, these conditions still allow for turfgrass establishment. Late planted grass seed will generally still come up and young seedlings will still tolerate cold. The largest challenge late planted turfgrass seedlings face in Kansas, however, is establishing an adequate root system before winter. Unless young turfgrass seedlings have a fairly extensive root system, the freezing and thawing that takes place during winter can push young seedlings out of the ground (called heaving). When this occurs, seedlings rapidly dry out and die.

Inconsistent moisture is a frequent challenge with late season seeding. Irrigation systems get turned off and hoses get drained for the season. Regardless of when the lawn was seeded, be sure any newly planted lawn is kept well watered through the fall. Even mature lawns will benefit going into the winter with moist soil, although less frequent watering will be needed to accomplish this.

Applying a fertilizer at the time of seeding, or as seedlings reach 2 inches in height, can also help nourish seedlings and promote root development. By supplying ample nutrients, increased root growth will help increase winter hardiness and reduce heaving.



When there is uncertainty about whether or not to establish late season plantings past October 15, it is usually worth trying to establish grass seed, rather than leaving the area unseeded. Kansas weather is always unpredictable and does not follow an exact calendar. In falls like this year, where milder weather patterns persist, additional growing conditions may help favor late overseeding, even if the results are not perfect.

Trees & Shrubs:



Selecting The Right Tree For Kansas:

With trees often being a once in a lifetime purchase for a property, it's critical to select the right tree for the site and to install it correctly. In Kansas, growing conditions vary wildly from east to west and north to south. The annual amounts of rainfall, average winter temperatures, and soil types all change dramatically across the state, making it difficult to select the right tree that can survive these extremes. Trees will vary greatly in their ability to adapt to these extremes, as well as in their purpose, function, and susceptibility to pests. A successful tree planting starts with selecting a tree that is well suited to all the conditions of your site.

The following tree characteristics are some of the most critical to match with the growing conditions of your planting site for the long-term success of a new tree:

- **Winter Hardiness:** Kansas regularly experiences bitterly cold temperatures each winter, and one way to classify the average extreme low temperature a location reaches is through the [USDA Plant Hardiness Zones](#). Kansas ranges from hardiness Zones 5B to 7A, with most of the state classified as Zone 6 (meaning the coldest temperature of the year averages between -10°F and 0°F, based on long term weather data). When selecting a tree, select a tree with your winter hardiness zone or a lower number (more cold hardy). It is often best to look for trees with a winter hardiness of Zone 5 or below, as Kansas frequently experiences low temperatures below our average.
- **Moisture Needs:** Consider how regularly the site receives rainfall, irrigation, flooding or other sources of water. Evaluate your willingness to water, and the ease of which you can do so. Then select a tree with the appropriate drought tolerance or wet tolerance, depending on site conditions.
- **Soil Adaptability:** Soil types vary significantly around the state, from heavy clay to loose, sandy loam. Not only does the soil type affect the soil's ability to hold water (soil drainage), but it affects the soil pH and fertility as well. Do not overlook matching the pH adaptability of your tree to the pH of the site. Doing so may create long-term problems such as iron chlorosis, which could be avoided by selecting a better adapted tree.
- **Adaptability To Site Exposure:** Evaluate the amount of sunlight, wind, and temperature extremes of your site, and select trees that match these conditions. Also consider the frequency of risk that natural disasters, such as hail, straight-line winds, ice storms, and wildfires may pose to potential new trees.
- **Susceptibility To Pests:** Review the list of potential insects, diseases, and pests that a potential tree may suffer from. The [Tree & Shrub Problems In Kansas Publication](#) and the [Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder](#) can both be helpful resources for a list of potential problems a tree may face. In addition to current problems, also consider susceptibility to future invasive species, such as the risk of Emerald Ash Borer to Ash trees.
- **Mature Size & Shape:** Evaluate the space available for growth, and what nearby objects or structures may limit future growth. Power lines, paved surfaces, and nearby buildings frequently require selecting trees with a limited size in order to fit the overall site conditions. Be sure to also consider underground obstacles, including buried utilities, septic and irrigation systems, and roots from nearby trees and shrubs.
- **Adaptability To Human Activity:** Consider how humans will interact with the tree. Will the tree need to provide clearance for sidewalks, driveways, street traffic, or mowing? These factors may change the type of tree you select.
- **Overall Function Or Purpose:** Finally, determine what the most important service a new tree will need to provide. Trees can provide shade, screening, a wind break, noise reduction, ornamental beauty (flowers or fall color), edible fruits or nuts, shelter for wildlife, as well as support for pollinators. Determine which of these functions are most important and select trees that match these goals.



K-State and the Kansas Forest Service have put together tree recommendations based on which portion of Kansas you live in. To find the list of recommended trees for your part of the state, visit the corresponding publication below:

- [Preferred Trees for Northeast Kansas](#)
- [Preferred Trees for Northwest Kansas](#)
- [Preferred Trees for South Central Kansas](#)
- [Preferred Trees for Southwest Kansas](#)

In addition to providing tree recommendations by location, there are several K-State publications that recommend trees based on tree type or growing condition. The following list of publications may also be helpful in identifying trees that fit specific growing conditions:

- [Drought Tolerant Trees](#)
- [Conifer Trees for Kansas: A Guide to Landscape Evergreens](#)
- [Flowering Crabapples](#)
- [Shade and Ornamental Trees](#)



Miscellaneous:

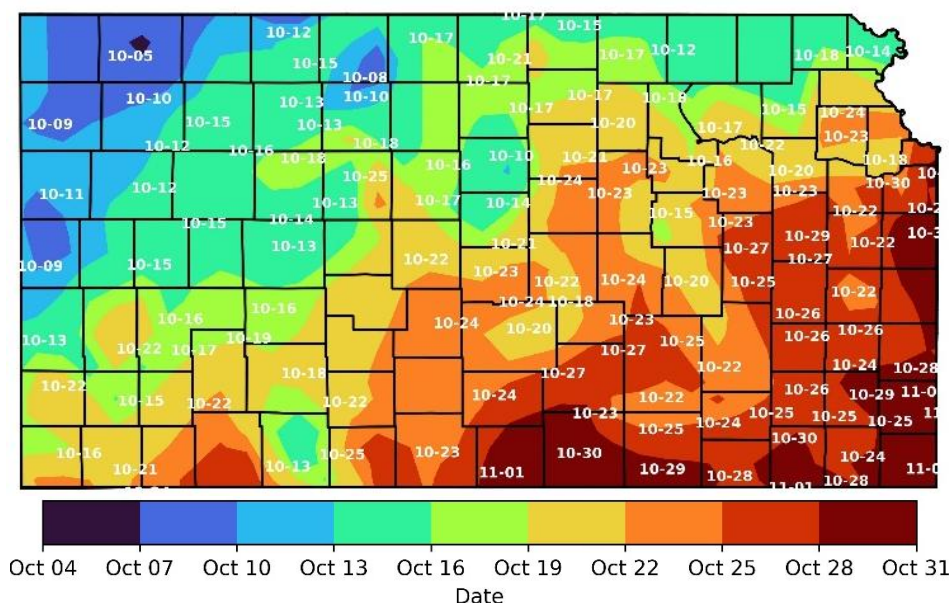
Predicting The Average First Frost In Kansas:

As we move into October, one expectation gardeners have is to begin nearing the end of the growing season. Frosts, freezes, and colder temperatures begin to set in, and after a long, hot summer, these conditions are often a welcome sight. The biggest question, however, is how quickly can we expect these conditions to occur?

While we are already experiencing a break from the 90 and 100 degree temperatures we experienced in most of September, that is still a long way from freezing. For most of Kansas, mid-October is when we would expect to

experience our first freeze in Kansas. This average will of course vary, depending on where you live in the state, as the first freeze map below demonstrates. For north and western Kansas, it is normal to experience the first freeze earlier in October, while south and eastern Kansas often experience their first freeze later in the month.

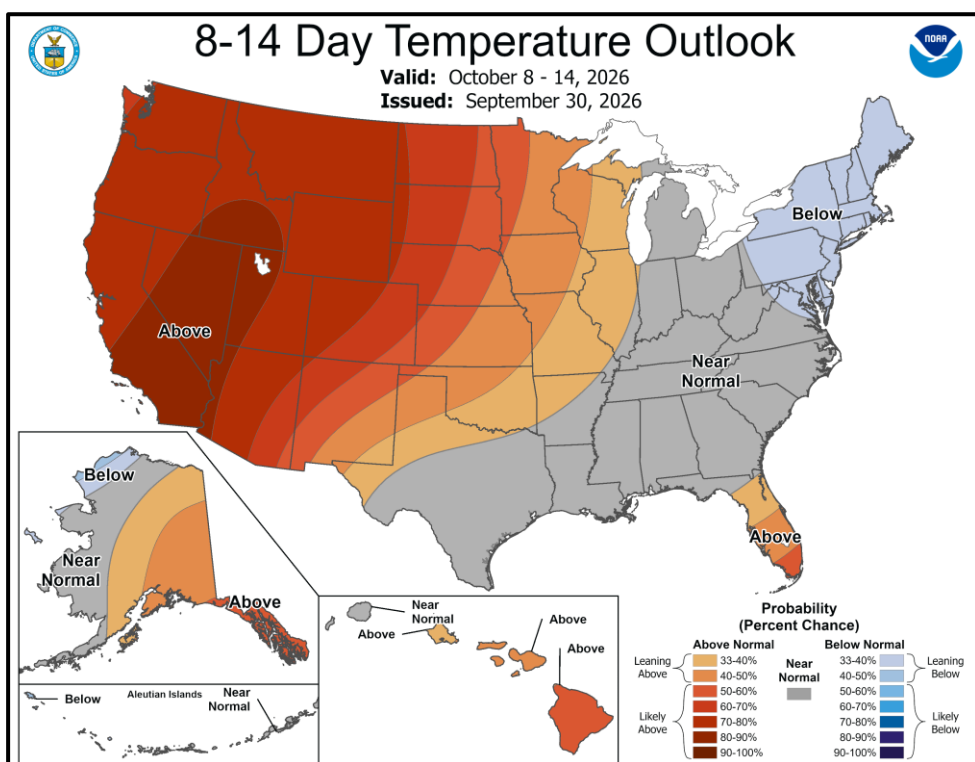
Average Date of First Fall Temp $\leq 32^{\circ}\text{F}$



Although average first frost dates give us an idea of when we can expect an end to the growing season, any Kansas gardener knows that the Kansas weather is usually anything but normal. This year, Kansans may be able to expect later than normal dates to experience their first freeze in 2026.

This fall, while daytime temperatures have begun to cool, overnight temperatures have continued to remain warmer than average. Recent moisture across the state has also helped to not only bring drought relief to much of the state but also increase air moisture. With elevated levels of air moisture and persistent cloud cover, these conditions make it more difficult for nighttime temperatures to cool. These factors will help to provide above average temperatures and moisture for much of October.

Air temperatures have been and are predicted to continue to remain above normal across the state for the rest of 2026, increasing the likelihood of experiencing a delayed first frost in Kansas. Both the 8-14 day and monthly temperature outlook maps from NOAA's (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Climate Prediction Center reflect these above average temperature predictions. While this weather pattern is very likely the case for at least early to mid-October in Kansas this fall, the warmer and wetter than normal conditions are also predicted through November and into December 2026.



Only time will tell for sure what mother nature has in store, but many parts of Kansas can likely expect later than normal first freezes this fall. With the increased moisture predicted in the forecast this month, as well as a lack of cold temperatures that usually develop, many plants may be delayed from their normal entrance into winter dormancy.

More Weather Facts:

The recent lack of cooler evening temperatures is quite unusual, and in some locations outright unprecedented. Take Goodland & Wichita as two quick examples:

- The coldest temperature in Goodland last month was 50°F. The normal low for September is 45°F. In over 130 years of climate data, there has never been a September in Goodland in which it didn't fall into the 40s at least once. This year breaks that streak.
- In Wichita, 60°F was the coldest recorded nighttime low temperature in September. In nearly 140 years of Wichita weather records, 55°F was previously the record for the warmest monthly low temperature for September (in both 1998 and 2019). This year again breaks that record.

It is quite possible that 2026 will be the warmest September in Kansas history. The official monthly average for the state will be released by the National Centers for Environmental Information on October 8.

The table below outlines other records several other location across Kansas, and the abnormally warm low temperatures recorded for the month of September 2026. Notice across the state there was a lack of 40 degree nights this past month.

Summary of September Minimum Temperatures In Kansas					
Location	Lowest Minimum Temperature Of September 2026 (date)	Record Warmest Minimum Temperature Of September (year)	Normal Low For September 30th	Year Climate Records Began	Latest First Fall Temperature Below 50°F On Record Before 2026 (Year, Temperature)
Concordia	56°F (23)	52°F (2019)	51°F	1885	October 3 (2019, 46°F)
Dodge City	54°F (22)	50°F (1969, 2019)	50°F	1874	October 5 (1969, 43°F)
Goodland	50°F (27)	46°F (2019, 2025)	44°F	1895	September 25 (1963, 49°F)
Manhattan	58°F (23)	55°F (2019)	51°F	1893	October 8 (2025, 47°F)
Salina	60°F (23)	52°F (1998, 2004)	52°F	1900	October 10 (2015, 47°F)
Topeka	58°F (24)	52°F (2019)	52°F	1887	October 8 (1944, 46°F)
Wichita	60°F (23)	55°F (1998, 2019)	54°F	1888	October 19 (2025, 40°F)

Contributors:

Matthew McKernan, Consumer Horticulture Extension Associate

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

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