



Horticulture Newsletter

September 15, 2026

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and
Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



With so many types of fertilizer available for our lawns and landscapes, it is important to know what we are purchasing and applying in our fertilization applications. One of the biggest differences in fertilizers is how quickly the nutrients are released and made available to the plant. Some fertilizers will release nutrients quickly, while other fertilizers release nutrients slowly over time. [This week's video covers how to determine whether a fertilizer is a quick or slow-release source of nutrients](#), and what you should

look for when purchasing a lawn fertilizer this fall: <https://youtu.be/Jyit6XOm1dU?si=EgFJNjTdRVKiUlrc>

Garden Calendar:

- Harvest winter squash when the outer rind becomes tough and is hard enough not to easily puncture with your fingernail.
- Walk the garden and pick up fallen fruit from the ground.
- Divide and replant most perennials, especially spring bloomers.
- Enrich soil by adding organic matter, such as compost, shredded leaves, manure, or cover crops.
- Plant new tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass lawns from seed or sod.
- Avoid pruning spring flowering shrubs, such as lilac and forsythia, this time of year to ensure spring flower buds aren't removed.
- Poinsettias can be forced into bloom for Christmas by starting a dark treatment of short days and long, uninterrupted nights.

Vegetables:

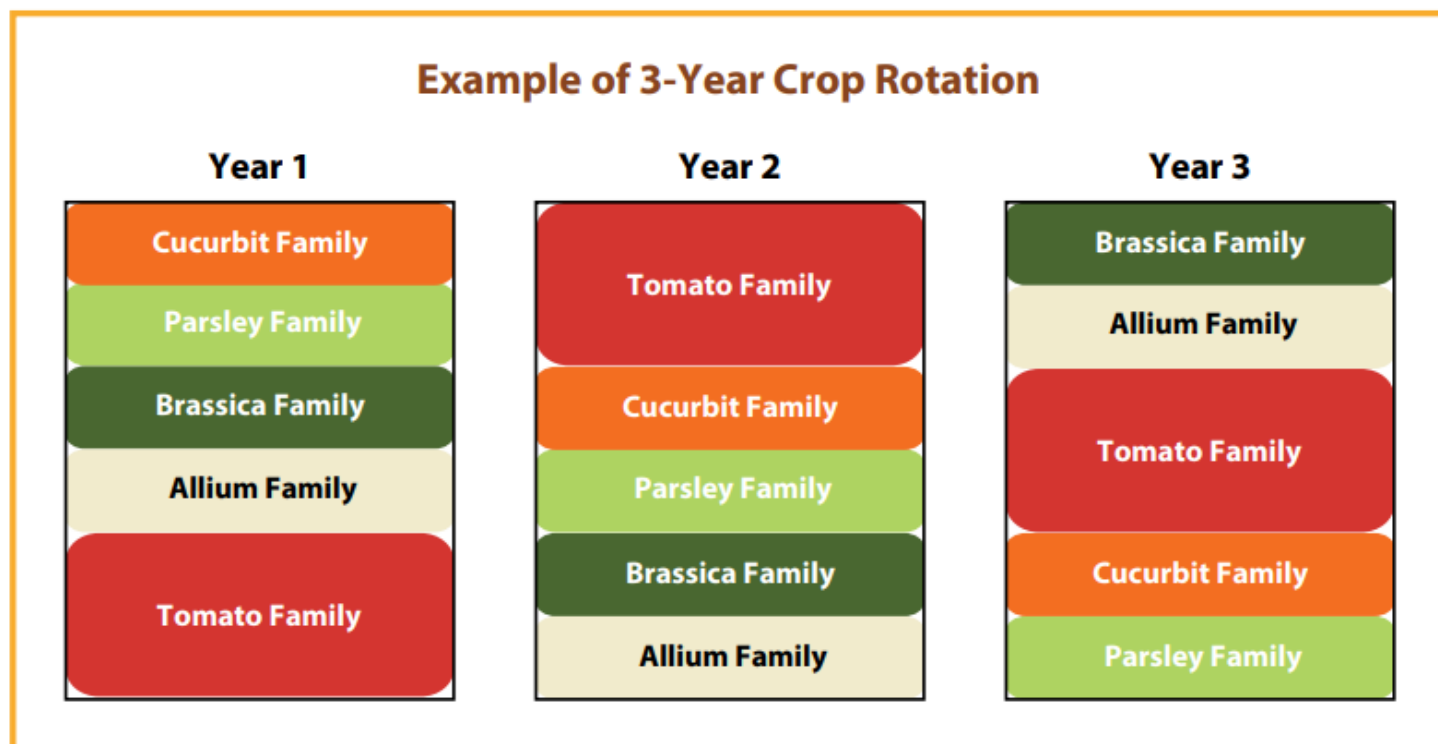
Plan For Crop Rotation In The Vegetable Garden:

One of the easiest ways to prevent insect and disease pressure in the garden, regardless of the size of the planting area, is to rotate vegetable crops. Simply by moving crops to a different planting location in the garden each year, gardeners can prevent the buildup of insect and disease pressure, in a process known as crop rotation.

Crop rotation is important because plants in the same family are typically susceptible to similar pests. These pests can overwinter in the soil or survive the winter on plant debris. If the same host is available when the pests emerge next spring, they will be able to continue infecting new plants and multiply the problem. Crop rotation breaks the cycle of these pests and limits problems from being carried over from one year to the next.

Another benefit of crop rotation is that different crops vary in the depth and density of their root system and extract different levels of soil nutrients. As a rule, cool-season crops such as cabbage, peas, lettuce and onions have relatively sparse, shallow root systems, while warm-season crops such as tomatoes, peppers and melons have deeper, better developed root systems. Therefore, it can be helpful to rotate warm-season and cool-season crops.

With crop rotation, it is important to not only change the specific crop type planted in each area, but also the plant family. For example, tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and eggplant are all closely related. In the location where tomatoes are growing now, avoid planting anything from the Solanaceae family (such as eggplant, pepper or potato) in the same spot for the next few years. Similarly, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and brussels sprouts share many similar pests. Therefore, avoid planting cabbage where broccoli or brussels sprouts were planted this year. Ideally, vegetable gardeners should build a 3-year rotation plan between different plant families.



So, why is crop rotation important to consider in the fall, at the end of the growing season? Now is the time to make a map of your garden, and document what vegetables grew where this year. It is easy to forget the current garden layout by next spring, so by taking good notes now, you can be better prepared for an effective crop rotation next spring.

Visit the [Kansas Garden Guide](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf) for more information on crop rotation, including example vegetable crop rotation plans: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf

Fruit:

Determining When Apples Are Ready To Pick:



Apples are a popular home-grown fruit, with most varieties ripening in the fall. However, the timing of fruit maturity varies considerably among cultivars. The harvest window for apples can be extended from July to October, depending on the selection of early-season or late-season maturing varieties.

With such a wide harvest window, here are some tips to help you decide when to pick your apples at the peak of maturity:

- **Exterior Color Change:** Some apples will develop a red skin color before they are ripe, so this is not a reliable indication of maturity. Instead, as apples mature, evaluate the apple skin color in the areas surrounding the stem and in the indentation at the bottom of the apple (calyx basin). Look for a light-yellow color that develops from the otherwise immature green fruit.
- **Interior Flesh Color:** As apples mature internally, and starches change into sugars, the interior flesh of the apple (mesocarp) changes from very light green to white. This difference may be most visible when a thin slice of apple is cut and held up to the light.
- **Seed Color:** Another internal evaluator of ripeness is seed color. As most fruit ripens, apple seeds will change from light green to brown in color on most varieties. This indicator is not absolute and should be combined with other indicators for best results.
- **Apple Flavor:** Look for apples with a sweet flavor. Flavor is an especially helpful guide if you know the apple variety you are growing and are familiar with how it should taste. If fruit are not ready to harvest, they will taste starchy or immature. If apples have already fallen to the ground and still taste starchy, store them for a period to see if flavors improve.
- **Days From Bloom:** Another reliable guide for determining the general maturity time of apples is the number of days from when the tree bloomed. Knowing the apple variety helps to further determine the necessary number of days required for maturity. Many varieties of apples have a known approximate number of days from bloom to maturity, including Jonathan at 135 days, Delicious and Golden Delicious at 145 days, and Winesap at 155 days. Weather conditions may influence the rate at which apples mature, so provide additional time in years with cooler weather.



Flowers:

10 Fall Blooming Plants For Pollinators & Late Season Color:



Fall is often one of the most anticipated seasons for Kansas gardeners, providing vibrant leaf colors, and perhaps most importantly of all, relief from the intense summer heat. While fall temperatures make gardening much more enjoyable, often by this time of year the heat and drought of summer have taken their toll on the garden. While there is always more work to do in the garden, these tired or bare areas provide an excellent opportunity to refresh the landscape with colorful fall-blooming plants.

As you look to bring colorful flowers back to your garden this fall, consider these ten plants for fall flowers that both you and the pollinators will love:

1. **Garden Mums** (*Chrysanthemum* spp.): First up on the list is the plant that everyone thinks of in fall, chrysanthemums or mums. Available in a wide variety of colors, these plants can make a reliable source of fall color. While mums can perennialize in the Kansas landscape, do not anticipate most fall-planted mums surviving the winter without additional water and care.
2. **Asters** (*Symphyotrichum* spp.): There are many species of asters that grow well in Kansas, often providing colorful pops of blues, purples, pinks, and lavenders to the landscape. Most asters will bloom from September through the first frost. Asters are often drought tolerant perennials, with several species native to Kansas.
3. **Goldenrod** (*Solidago* spp.): Another fall classic, goldenrod provides long, slender branchlets filled with bright yellow flowers that pollinators adore. There are many species and cultivars of goldenrod, including eleven species native to Kansas.
4. **Sedum** (*Hylotelephium* spp.): A tough drought tolerant plant, that rightly earns the common name "Live-Forevers". Sedum provide excellent late season color with their large clusters of pink flowers. While many new varieties are available on the market, 'Autumn Joy' and 'Autumn Fire' are two of the most common cultivars.



5. **Joe-Pye Weed** (*Eutrochium purpureum*): This Kansas native produces a round, dome-shaped cluster of purple flowers each fall. With many new cultivars introduced, this perennial comes in a wide range of sizes, from 24-80 inches tall.

6. **Sneezeweed** (*Helenium* spp.): This perennial produces yellow, orange, and red daisy-like flowers, and has upright, bushy growth in full sun. One of my

favorite sneezeweeds is Bitter sneezeweed (*Helenium amarum*) which is a Kansas native that grows only 4-18 inches tall and has bright yellow flowers.

7. **Maxamillian Sunflower** (*Helianthus maximiliani*): There are many sunflowers that bring bright yellow flowers into the fall garden, but Maxamillian Sunflower is one of the most consistent for late season flowers. Reaching up to 9 feet tall, this Kansas native may not be right for every garden but will be great for backs of the border and sites with large open spaces.
8. **Ageratum** (*Ageratum houstonianum*): Sometimes called floss flower, this annual flower produces fluffy blue flowers with long, slender petals. Also available in lavender, purple, pink, and white, this plant is known for its long bloom season.
9. **Autumn Crocus** (*Colchicum* sp.): While not actually a true crocus, this fall blooming plant brings surprisingly colorful flowers without the presence of any leaves. One to ten pink or purple cup-shaped flowers are produced each fall by this perennial bulb, each usually lasting about two weeks.
10. **Salvia** (*Salvia* spp.): Most salvias will serve as a summer annual, however, with enough protection, plants may occasionally overwinter. They bring bushy, upright growth in a variety of flower colors, including blue, purple, red, and white. 'Black and Blue' Salvia and Mexican Bush Sage (*Salvia leucantha*) are two salvia varieties to try for showy fall color.



Turf:

Help Dormant Lawns Recover Before Starting Fall Lawn Care:



After several months of intense heat and drought stress, many tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass lawns across Kansas have entered a dormant state. While dormant, these lawns turn brown and require less water for survival, but still remain alive at the base of the plants (crown). Most cool season lawns can survive two to three weeks of dormancy without any water, and up to 8 weeks with only minimal irrigation.

While early fall (September) is typically the ideal time to fertilize, core aerate, overseed, and perform other important cultural practices on cool-season lawns, these practices will have limited benefit while lawns are still dormant and under continuing heat or drought stress.

Instead of jumping into fall lawn maintenance, consider delaying fall maintenance practices until weather conditions improve or provide additional care to alleviate sources of stress.

The easiest way to encourage recovery is by watering dormant lawns one to two weeks before beginning fall lawn care. Apply water slowly and deeply, irrigating to provide moisture 6 to 8 inches deep in the soil. This requires approximately 1.5 inches of water to accomplish. When light rainfalls occur, consider using irrigation

practices to supplement natural rainfall. Water moves more readily into moist soil versus dry soil, so maximize small rainfalls by applying 1/4 to 1/2 inch additional water immediately after a rain.



Always allow the soil to dry some before watering again and avoid overwatering dormant lawns. While drought stress is a common factor leading to summer dormancy, increasing irrigation frequency may not be the only solution. Many cool season lawns also suffer from heat stress, which can cause a similar decline in turf quality. This is because cool season turfgrasses thrive when air temperatures are between 65°F and 75°F. Once air temperatures consistently exceed 85°F, they experience heat stress, especially when nighttime cooling is minimal.

Hot soil temperatures can also limit turfgrass growth. When soil temperatures rise above 70°F, root efficiency drops significantly and root decline is likely to occur. Watering can help immediately cool soil temperatures, however excessive watering can compound stress by limiting long-term changes in soil temperature (such as cooling) and by limiting oxygen availability to the roots.

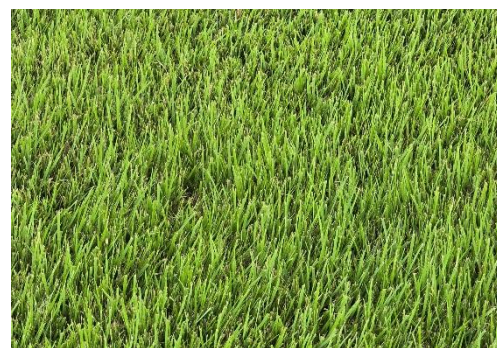
In addition to supplemental watering, improve recovery from summer dormancy by limiting foot traffic and decreasing the frequency of mowing.

Although some steps may be taken to aid turfgrass recovery from dormancy, not all stresses can be relieved by adjusting cultural practices. Traditional scheduling of routine maintenance may need to be delayed a few weeks to allow for temperatures to cool and more favorable weather patterns to return. In many cases, patience will provide lawns with the conditions necessary for recovery.

With proper watering and enough patience, along with timely fertilization and cooling, fall weather will encourage the return of a healthy green lawn.

An Overview Of Fall Lawn Care:

Fall is the most important time of year to care for our cool season lawns in Kansas. Cooler temperatures and more consistent moisture boost the growth of our tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass lawns in the fall. By planning our maintenance accordingly, we can improve the health of our cool season lawns all year round by taking the appropriate actions now. Over the next three months, those routine maintenance steps include:



In September:

- Fertilize all cool season lawns. This is the most important time to fertilize.
- Aerate soils to improve soil health.
- Plant new lawns or overseed thin lawns.
- Apply weed preventers in early September to prevent cool season weeds such as henbit, chickweed,

and little barley. Do not use weed preventers if overseeding or planting new grass seed.

- Water established lawns only as needed to prevent wilt.
- Spray dandelions if not planting or overseeding.
- Dethatch turfgrass if needed.

In October:

- Spray established lawns for broadleaf weeds, such as dandelions, chickweed and henbit.
- Complete any tall fescue grass seed planting prior to October 15th.
- Fertilize newly seeded lawns at a half rate.
- Manage fallen leaves on the lawn to prevent the grass from being suffocated under too thick a layer of fallen leaves. Consider mulching leaves to increase soil organic matter, rather than bagging and removing them.



In November:

- Fertilize established lawns a second time. This fertilization will help lawns green up earlier next spring.
- Fertilize newly seeded lawns for a second time at a half rate.
- Set the mowing height at 2 to 2½ inches for the last mowing.
- Soak the soil thoroughly with a final watering before winter.

Miscellaneous:

Begin Preparing Houseplants For Overwintering Indoors:

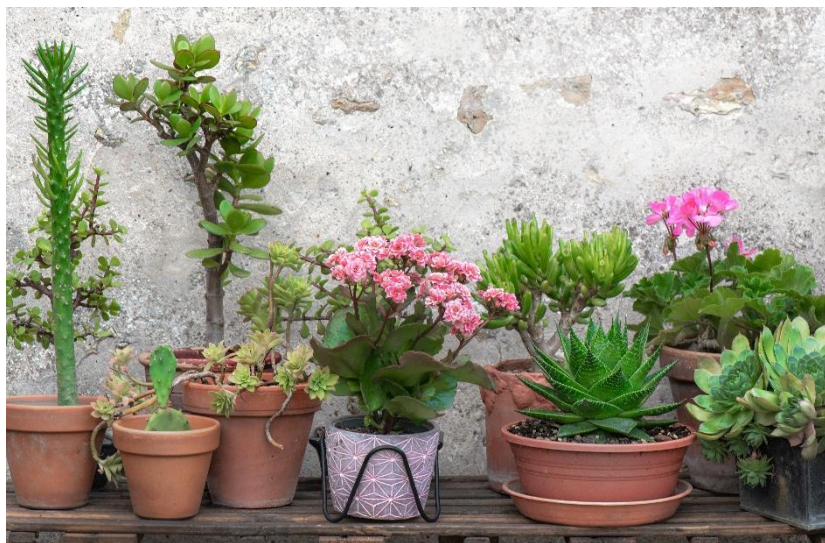


Many people move houseplants outside for the summer to give them better growing conditions and to help them recover from the stress of an indoor environment. As fall approaches, low nighttime temperatures (below 55°F) become a concern for houseplants left outdoors. While temperatures below 55°F are still a little ways off in our nightly forecasts, now is a good time to begin preparing house plants for the move indoors.

The biggest challenge houseplants face when moving indoors for the winter is the lower light levels plants experience. It usually takes four to eight weeks for houseplants to adjust between their full sun, outdoor summer locations, and the light levels of their indoor winter homes. Depending on the degree of difference in light levels, this process may take more or less time. If houseplants make this transition too quickly, plants will be likely to develop yellow leaves that drop from the plant. This is because of the differences in leaf structure between leaves that reside in full sun vs full shade.

Research done in Florida in the late 1970s revealed that tropical plants grown under high light conditions produce 'sun leaves', while plants grown under low light conditions have 'shade leaves.' These leaf types differ in their internal structure, with sun leaves having less chlorophyll (the substance that plants use to convert sunlight to energy), and the chlorophyll present being located deeper inside the leaf tissue. Sun leaves tend to be thicker, smaller and more numerous, while shade leaves are thinner, larger, and fewer in number.

When plants are moved from one light condition to another (high to low or low to high) they need time to adjust, through a process known as acclimatization. If plants are forced to acclimatize to lower indoor light levels too quickly, they tend to drop their sun leaves and produce new shade leaves. This process of producing new leaves requires significant energy from the plant. If the acclimatization process is slower and less drastic, however, the plant can convert existing sun leaves into shade leaves that do better under low light conditions (and vice versa in the spring when going from shade to sun).



Instead of waiting to acclimate houseplants to lower light levels indoors, begin the process now, outside. Move houseplants located in full sun into areas with light shade. Allow plants to acclimate to light shade for two or more weeks, then continue to move plants into deeper shade. Continue this process outdoors until cooler temperatures require the plants to be moved indoors. Similarly, once indoors, plants will want to be placed in the brightest indoor location possible, and gradually acclimatized to their darker, permanent winter location.

By starting the acclimatization process outside, you can reduce the amount of time required during this indoor transition and increase the likelihood of plants maintaining their existing leaves. The more gradual the decreases are in light levels, the more easily plants will be able to adapt, and the more likely plants will be to keep their leaves.

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