



Horticulture Newsletter

September 29, 2026

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and
Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



While we wrap up most crops in the vegetable garden this time of year, garlic is a crop that is just now getting started for the season. Mid-September through mid-November makes a great time for planting garlic in Kansas. When garlic is planted in the first part of October, this is when it typically produces the largest bulbs and the greatest overall yield the following summer during harvest.

[This week's video covers how easy garlic is to grow and store](https://youtu.be/u8rKHt8LC-w?si=MOlcRIJfCVdepFPz), and includes information on how to purchase, plant, and care for garlic this fall: <https://youtu.be/u8rKHt8LC-w?si=MOlcRIJfCVdepFPz>

Announcements:

October K-State Garden Hour:

Join us next week, on Wednesday, October 7, 2026, for the next K-State Garden Hour webinar on "Groundcovers for Kansas - Covering Your Bases". The presentation will be live from Noon to 1pm. Discover the many groundcovers that can be grown in Kansas, and which groundcovers thrive best in the sun, the shade, and all of the areas in between. 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

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY Extension

Garden Calendar:

- Harvest pumpkins when the flesh is completely orange and the stem no longer leaks after being cut from the vine. Avoid carrying pumpkins by the stem.
- Herbs can be dug from the garden and placed in pots for indoor use this winter.

- Dig gladiolus as foliage begins to yellow. Air-dry bulbs before storing for winter.
- As plants dieback for winter, clean up garden areas that have had obvious insect or disease problems. Sanitation helps to reduce pests next year.
- Mow turfgrass at 2 to 3 inches tall. Sharpen the mower blade for a clean cut.
- Rake up fallen leaves and compost them.
- Clean and wash houseplants off before moving them indoors in order to reduce insect pest populations.

Vegetables:

Harvesting Sweetpotatoes:

Fall is the time to begin harvesting sweetpotatoes. Unlike most fruits and vegetables, sweetpotatoes do not ripen or mature. Instead, sweetpotatoes continue to grow until a desirable size is reached for harvest, or until the first fall freeze occurs. This means sweetpotatoes can be harvested anytime a desirable size is reached, so digging test hills can be helpful to monitor sweetpotato size.

Many early season sweetpotato varieties are usually ready for harvest in mid- to late September, while mid-season varieties are usually ready in early October. If a smaller sized sweetpotato is preferred, harvesting earlier than this may be required. All sweetpotatoes should be harvested immediately following the first fall freeze, as sweetpotatoes are sensitive to cold temperatures and may be damaged by further exposure to cold weather.

For many, the ideal sweetpotato is a root that is between 3 to 9 inches in length, with a diameter ranging from 1.75 inches to 3.5 inches. Sweetpotatoes should be firm, smooth, well-shaped, and free from damage attributed to diseases and insects.



Begin sweetpotato harvest by removing plant vines. In large plantings, use a rotary mower or flail mower to mow back vines. Gently lift the potatoes with a potato fork, broad fork, shovel, or other tool, taking care not to damage, bruise, or slice through roots when digging.

Sweetpotatoes do not easily separate from the vines, so hand removal is usually necessary. Once sweetpotatoes are removed from the vine, snap off side roots and root ends on the sweetpotato root to create a more desirable appearance. Take care when handling freshly dug sweetpotatoes, as the roots are easily bruised. Discard defective roots and carefully pack the sweetpotatoes for curing and storage.

Because the harvesting process often damages the tender sweetpotato skin, sweetpotatoes should be cured after being dug. This process helps small wounds heal, prolongs the shelf life, and helps convert starches into sugars within the sweetpotato. This process improves both the texture and flavor of the sweetpotatoes.

To cure, place unwashed sweetpotatoes in a warm, humid location for 5 to 10 days immediately after digging. Temperatures should ideally range from 85°F to 90°F. A space heater can be used to heat the curing room.



Raise the humidity of the space with a humidifier or by placing moist towels or burlap in the room. Ideally sweetpotatoes should cure at 85% to 90% relative humidity. The curing room may need to be occasionally ventilated to remove excessive moisture.

Test if curing is complete by rubbing one sweetpotato against another. If the skins are easily scratched, more curing is needed. If warm temperatures and high humidity can be provided, curing can be accomplished in as quickly as 5 to 7 days, however under lower temperatures additional time will be required.

After curing, sweetpotatoes are best stored at temperatures between 50°F to 55°F with high humidity. Do not allow storage temperatures to drop below 50°F, as this can severely and permanently injure the roots, shorten storage life, and result in poor flavor. If properly cured and stored, sweetpotatoes can be easily stored for 4 to 6 months.

Flowers:

Selecting Chrysanthemums For Peak Fall Color:

Chrysanthemums or "mums" are one of the hallmark signs of fall in the garden. These perennial plants cover themselves in blooms as days shorten in length and the nights become longer. Chrysanthemum flowers can come in a wide variety of colors, including white, cream, red, yellow, orange, pink, lime green, bronze, rust, maroon, lavender or purple.

Mums can be a great way to decorate for fall, or to plant in the garden as a perennial plant. For many gardeners, purchasing mums is a great way to replace tired, sick, or otherwise spent plants in the landscape that have weathered the summer heat. In order to make the most of your mum purchase, it is important to select mums that will provide the greatest amount of color. Here are some tips for purchasing mums.



Time your purchase with the weather to maximize the length of time chrysanthemum flowers bloom. Mum flowers don't tolerate summer heat well, so avoid purchasing mums that are in full bloom in late July or August if you expect a long blooming period. Mums can be forced to bloom very early, but mum flowers will not last long until fall temperatures cool. Waiting until temperatures cool to purchase your mums will provide the longest bloom period. Chrysanthemum flowers will last longest in temperatures ranging from 60°F to 70°F and cease flowering after exposure to the first freeze.

When purchasing mums, evaluate the number of buds on the plant. Mums should be dense, bushy, and covered with numerous buds. Look for plants that are large and rounded. The larger the plant, typically the more buds you can expect. Make sure branches are not damaged or snapped. Mum stems can break easily, especially when being handled, transported, or blown over by wind. Avoid plants with broken branches and stems. Also avoid mums that have discolored foliage, fading flowers, spindly stems or no buds.



Next evaluate the size and conditions of the buds and prioritize buds over blooms. Buds should generally be pea sized, or slightly smaller. In most cases, buying mums with buds that are pea sized, green, and tightly closed will be best. Look for mums with 0-25% of the buds that are open (buds that are just beginning to show color as the buds break open). Buds will continue to develop and open as fall progresses, and if buds are unopened at purchase, you should experience the full flowering of the mums after purchase. If mum buds are already fully opened at

purchase, the flower quality will decrease more rapidly over time, meaning that the mums will have a shorter flowering window remaining for you to enjoy. The warmer the temperatures, the more quickly buds will develop and flowers will open. If mums are purchased late in the season or are going to be placed in areas of deep shade (such as a shady front porch), consider looking for mums that have at least 25-50% of their buds open, in order for the buds to bloom before the first freezes of winter. Fully blooming mums often last only 1-3 weeks with flowers, depending on the weather and the number of days the mum has been blooming before purchase. Mums that have tightly closed buds at purchase tend to bloom for up to 4-5 weeks with color once flowering begins.



Caring For & Perennializing Fall Planted Chrysanthemums:



Mums offer many benefits to the landscape. Whether planted for annual color or grown as a perennial, there are many factors that will influence how long mums bloom in the fall and how well they come back in following years.

For mums to have the greatest chances of establishing in the landscape, plant mums in areas of full sun with well drained soil.

Mums are shallow rooted and will need frequent watering during establishment, especially when planting large, bushy plants. Too much water or too little water can reduce flowering, so monitor soil

moisture closely. Check the soil moisture of the root ball daily, and water as needed. Although mums may need frequent watering when fall planted, mums do not like “wet feet,” so ensure good soil drainage and prevent keeping the soil flooded or over saturated.



Do not worry about fertilizing mums in the fall once flower buds begin to open and show color. Fertilizers may be beneficial only until the buds begin to open. After that point, only water is necessary for fall care.

Although mums are most commonly sold in the fall months, fall planted mums are not dependable at establishing in the fall. When planting mums in the fall, improve the chances that plants perennialize by planting mums in September or early October, in order to start establishing a root system before the onset of winter. The later the planting date, the less likely mums are to survive the winter. For the greatest success perennializing mums into the landscape, plant mums in the spring in Kansas.

The most important key to overwintering fall planted mums is to maintain adequate soil moisture throughout the winter months. This requires supplemental watering 2-3 times per month during the dead of winter, when rain and snowfall are not present.

Providing several inches of mulch around mums can help insulate plants and further preserve soil moisture. Mulch also helps to moderate ground temperatures and decreases the chances of mums being heaved from the soil during the freezing and thawing cycles of winter.

Keep in mind that chrysanthemums vary greatly in their winter hardiness, depending on the variety. Not all mums sold in the fall will be winter hardy in Kansas. If plants fail to overwinter, it may be due to the cold hardiness of the plant, rather than the care you provided.

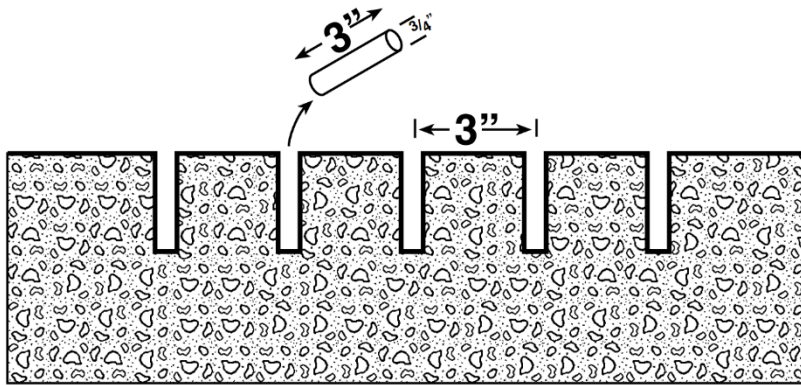
Turf:

Why Aeration Matters For Turfgrass In Kansas:

Fall is a popular time for aeration of cool-season turfgrasses in Kansas. Whether managing a home lawn, athletic field, golf course, or other turf area, aeration remains one of the most beneficial cultural practices available for improving conditions within the root zone. While the process may temporarily affect turf quality, the long-term benefits to soil health, root growth, and overall turf performance often outweigh the short-term disruption.

What is aeration? Aeration encompasses a variety of cultivation practices designed to improve conditions within the root zone. One of the most common methods is core aeration, which removes small plugs, or cores, of soil from the turf. Other aeration methods may utilize solid tines, needle tines, deep-tine equipment, or other cultivation techniques, depending on site conditions and management objectives.





Proper aerator hole size and spacing

Aeration provides several important benefits to turfgrass systems. By improving conditions within the root zone, aeration can help relieve soil compaction, improve water infiltration, enhance gas exchange within the soil profile, and promote root growth. These improvements help create a healthier growing environment for turfgrass roots.

In addition to improving soil health and root growth, aeration can also be used to manage thatch. Thatch is a layer of dead and living plant material that accumulates between the green vegetation and the soil surface. A small amount of thatch can be beneficial, however, excessive thatch accumulation can interfere with water infiltration, rooting, and overall turfgrass performance.

When managing thatch, it is important to recognize that aeration, verticutting, and power raking all serve different purposes. Aeration is primarily intended to improve soil conditions and relieve compaction, although core aeration can provide some reduction in thatch accumulation. Verticutting and power raking are typically used when excessive thatch accumulation is the primary concern.

In the fall, aeration is commonly combined with fertilization and overseeding of cool-season turfgrass. By creating openings in the soil surface, aeration can improve seed-to-soil contact and provide a favorable environment for seed germination and establishment. As a result, aeration is often incorporated into fall renovation and overseeding programs.

Although aeration is proven to improve turfgrass performance, one of the most common misconceptions about aeration is that it should immediately improve turfgrass appearance. In reality, aeration is a practice that temporarily disrupts the turf by creating holes and, in some cases, depositing soil cores. While the short-term appearance may not be ideal, the long-term improvements in overall turf performance often outweigh the temporary disruption. For the greatest benefits of aeration, core aerate your lawn for at least three years in a row.



Aeration is an investment in long-term turfgrass health. By improving conditions within the root zone, aeration can support healthier roots, improve water movement, offer better oxygen exchange, and enhanced turf performance. [Visit our Aerating Your Lawn publication](#) for more information on the benefits of aeration, and how to enhance your lawn performance using aeration:

https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/aerating-your-lawn_MF2130

Trees & Shrubs:

Recognize Pine Wilt Disease Symptoms This Fall:



The late summer to early fall months (August to December) are the time of year in Kansas when Pine Wilt symptoms become easily recognizable. Infected trees rapidly wilt and die in a short period of time, usually within several weeks to only a few months. Trees first develop a gray-green color in the needles, which turn yellow and then brown. This discoloration can sometimes occur branch by branch, or throughout the entire tree all at once. Once dead, the brown needles stay attached to the tree for up to a year after the tree has died.

Although the onset of Pine Wilt disease symptoms can be sudden, the introduction of the problem begins earlier in the year (May-July). Pine Wilt is caused by the pinewood nematode (*Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*). This microscopic worm enters the tree, and both feeds and multiplies within the tree's resin canals. As the nematodes multiply, they clog the water conducting tissues of the tree. This creates the rapid wilting and collapse of the tree. Due to the reduced resin flow, infected trees have wood that is very light weight, dry, and brittle.

Because the pinewood nematodes are so small, they are unable to infect new trees without the help of the pine sawyer beetle (*Monochamus spp.*). The pine sawyer beetle is a long-horned borer. The pine sawyer beetle spreads the nematode from one tree to another as it feeds, lays eggs, and bores into the wood of the tree as a larva.

Both the nematode and the beetles overwinter within the infected, dead tree. Around May 1st of each year, the pine sawyer beetles start emerging from infected trees, carrying nematodes to new trees and continuing the cycle of infection.

All types of pine are susceptible to pine wilt, with Scots, Austrian, white, and Mugo pines being the most common hosts. Trees that are under stress are especially susceptible to infection.

Once infected with Pine Wilt, trees cannot be saved. Dead pine trees suspected of having Pine Wilt disease should be cut down to ground level and removed from the site. Do not leave a stump. Wood from diseased trees should be immediately chipped or burned to destroy the beetles and nematodes. Do not save or transport the wood for firewood, as logs can allow for future pine sawyer beetle emergence and serve as a potential breeding ground. Plan to remove any dead pine tree prior to April 1st in order to limit beetle emergence and reduce the spread of Pine Wilt.



In addition to removing dead trees, limit stress on living pine trees by providing water during drought periods. Preventative injections are available, however, none provide 100% control and are therefore generally not recommended. Keep in mind that injections have no curative power. Once a tree is infected there is no way to stop the disease.

There are many other problems pine trees face that can also be confused for the early stages of pine wilt development. Tree decline due to environmental stress, as well as Pine Tip Blight, can also cause branch-by-branch dieback in pines. These problems, however, tend to progress more slowly and over multiple years.

[Testing is available through the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab](#) to confirm the presence of Pine Wilt Disease, however any dead pine tree should be treated as though it has been infected with pine wilt and removed immediately.



[Visit our Pine Diseases in Kansas publication](#) for more information on Pine Wilt, as well as Pine Tip Blight and other common pine tree issues: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/pine-diseases-in-kansas-tip-blight-dothistroma-needle-blight-and-pine-wilt_L722

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

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