



Horticulture Newsletter

September 8, 2026

KANSAS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Horticulture and
Natural Resources

Video of the Week:



Peonies are often one of the toughest and longest-lived perennials in the Kansas landscape. They can often grow with minimal care for multiple generations. Whether to reinvigorate old plants, to replant peonies that no longer bloom, or to share with family and friends, now is the time of year to consider dividing peonies. [This week's video covers dividing peonies to share](https://youtu.be/C6Ts6tcdljl?si=a0Zq9edpVolbkkxJ), and demonstrates simple ways to divide and replant peonies: <https://youtu.be/C6Ts6tcdljl?si=a0Zq9edpVolbkkxJ>

Garden Calendar:

- Pick apples and pears as they reach maturity. Store fruit in a cool place to extend freshness and shelf life.
- Fertilize cool season grasses, such as tall fescue, with fertilizers that contain a high nitrogen source.
- Renovate tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass lawns by verticutting to remove dead turfgrass growth.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs, such as tulips, daffodils, crocus, and more.
- Fall is an ideal time to plant new trees and shrubs. Both deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs can be planted now. Evergreen plants are often best planted in late winter to early spring, however.
- Refresh mulch rings around trees, while also pulling mulch back 6 to 12 inches away from the root flare.
- Fertilize houseplants before winter conditions arrive and shorter days slow growth.

Announcements:

Leaf Scorch Continues To Develop As Summer Heat Continues:

Following a week of triple digit heat across most of the state, many plants are showing signs of environmental stress. The most common symptom of environmental stress is leaf scorch. Be sure to [revisit the article "Environmental Stress And Leaf Scorch On Plants" from the August 25th Horticulture Newsletter](#) to review how to distinguish environmental leaf scorch from diseases and other plant problems. The article begins at the bottom of page 6, and continues to the top of page 8.



Vegetables:

Build Soils In The Off-Season Using Cover Crops:

Cover crops are any plant grown to cover the soil. Most often cover crops are incorporated into the soil, rather than grown for harvest. While cover crops are often used in agricultural settings, they also bring many benefits to the home garden as well.



Many cover crops improve soil quality by providing a source of organic matter and nutrients to the soil. Some cover crops help to improve soil structure, increase drainage, reduce compaction, increase moisture content and prevent soil erosion. Other times, cover crops can be used to reduce weed problems or to provide food sources for pollinators and other beneficial insects. If we are lucky, cover crops provide a combination of these and other benefits to the garden.



Different cover crops can be used (both individually and in combinations) to enhance your garden soil in a variety of ways. To help provide some of the nitrogen the soil needs, consider legume cover crops like crimson clover, hairy vetch, Sunn hemp, or field peas. To break up heavy, compacted soils, look for are forage radish (also known as oilseed radish) and forage turnip as cover crops. Buckwheat is a great cover crop to suppress summer weeds, while also attracting pollinators. Various grass, legume and forb cover crops - such as annual ryegrass, oilseed radish, winter cereal rye, and oats - can provide seasonal cover and help cycle unused soil nutrients back into the soil for the next growing season.

To select the best cover crop for your garden, consider the time of year, the benefit the cover crop provides, and how you plan to terminate the cover crop at the end of the season.

Small grains such as wheat should be seeded from mid-September to late October at a rate of $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 pound of seed per 1,000 square feet. Spring oats can also be seeded until mid-September but the rate should be 2 to 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Spring oats will die back in the winter and can be tilled under in the spring.

Seed hairy vetch, alfalfa and sweetclover at a rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of seed per 1,000 square feet of garden. Hairy vetch and alfalfa can be seeded from mid-August to late September while sweetclover should be seeded only until early-September.

Daikon radishes can be planted mid-August to late September. After the radishes die back in the winter, the loosened soil is better able to absorb and retain water.

[Visit page 31 of the Kansas Garden Guide pdf \(Chapter 4: Improving Soil Health\) for more cover crop recommendations for home gardeners: \[https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf#page=31\]\(https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf#page=31\)](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/kansas-garden-guide_S51.pdf#page=31)



Fruit:

Consider Fall Planting Of June-Bearing Strawberries In Kansas:



For many gardeners, planting strawberries in Kansas occurs in mid-March to early April, as early as the soil can be worked. These cooler springtime weather conditions are favorable for strawberry plant growth. At this time of year, plants are often dormant when planted. Late winter to early springtime conditions can be highly variable, however, making planting difficult at that time of year. Alternatively, fall also provides a window for planting June-bearing strawberries that is often overlooked.

For several years now (since 2024), researchers at our K-State Olathe Horticulture Research-Extension Center have been studying the optimal time for planting June-bearing strawberries in Kansas. Studying annual plasticulture strawberry production, their initial findings show that June-bearing strawberries can be planted now, from late August through late September. In this style of production, strawberries are grown in plastic-mulch-covered raised beds, often with drip irrigation installed beneath the mulch. The June-bearing strawberry plants are then grown as an annual crop, established each year and removed after a single fruiting season (May to June).

While fall planting of strawberries can be successful, strawberries planted too late in the fall may have poor establishment and not receive enough growing degree days for adequate spring fruit production. To see if spring yields could be increased, an experiment was designed to test if covering strawberries with row covers for two weeks after planting would increase the growing degree days enough to boost yield.

In their research, the cultivar 'Ruby June' was planted in late August, mid-September, and late September of 2024 and 2025. Plants were spaced 15 inches apart in rows, with 12 inches between rows. Some of the strawberry rows were provided with row covers after planting for two weeks, and others were grown with no row cover. For the strawberries protected with row covers for the first two weeks after planting, a lightweight spunbonded polypropylene fabric (1.2 oz per square yard) was used. Over the winter months, a thicker, high-density spunbonded polypropylene fabric (1.5 oz per square yard) row cover was used on all strawberry plants to provide winter protection.

Early results from this research indicate that June-bearing strawberries can be planted from late August through late September without negatively affecting yield or fruit quality. The floating row covers helped increase cumulative growing degree days during fall establishment in both years; however, the row covers did not significantly affect overall yield or fruit quality the following spring compared with uncovered rows.



Further strawberry research continues at the Olathe Horticulture Research-Extension Center, including testing strawberry varieties best recommended for Kansas. While this work is ongoing, preliminary findings indicate that 'Chandler' may be a high-performing variety for Kansas, as it has produced consistently competitive yields over two seasons of research. 'Camino Real', 'Keystone' and 'Fronteras' also showed strong yield potential in their first year of data (2025-2026), but further evaluation will be needed to see how all these strawberry varieties perform across the varied growing conditions of each production season. As with all research, there is always more to learn.

Flowers:

Initiate Reblooming Of Thanksgiving And Christmas Cacti:



Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) and Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) are popular flowering holiday plants. Both are epiphytes native to the jungles of South America. Epiphytic plants grow on other plants and use them for support but not for nutrients. Though these cacti are different species, they will hybridize and produce varying stem shapes. Christmas cactus normally have smooth stem segments. Thanksgiving Cactus have hook-like appendages on each segment.

Flowering on Thanksgiving and Christmas Cacti will not occur unless induced by the necessary temperature and light conditions. When temperatures drop below 50°F, flowering is prevented. When temperatures are held at 50°F to 55°F, flowering will occur regardless of day length. However, under these conditions flowering is usually not uniform.

To stimulate the best flowering, provide temperatures between 59°F and 69°F and nights with greater than 12 hours of darkness. Providing these conditions for 25 consecutive long nights will initiate optimal flower bud production. After these requirements are met, an additional 9 to 10 weeks is required for flower bud development and bloom.

In the fall, nights will naturally become longer. As fall equinox occurs (September 22 this year), nights will begin to grow longer than 12 hours in length. A plant that receives only natural sunlight, and is kept from all artificial light during nighttime hours, will have the 25-day requirement met about October 18th. The additional 9 to 10 weeks will also be required for flower bud development and bloom (with peak bloom around December 24th).

Both Thanksgiving and Christmas Cacti grow best in bright, indirect light. Provide consistent soil moisture, but do not keep the potting soil waterlogged. These plants also tend to flower best if kept in pots that are a little root bound. If you need to repot, wait until spring.

Turf:

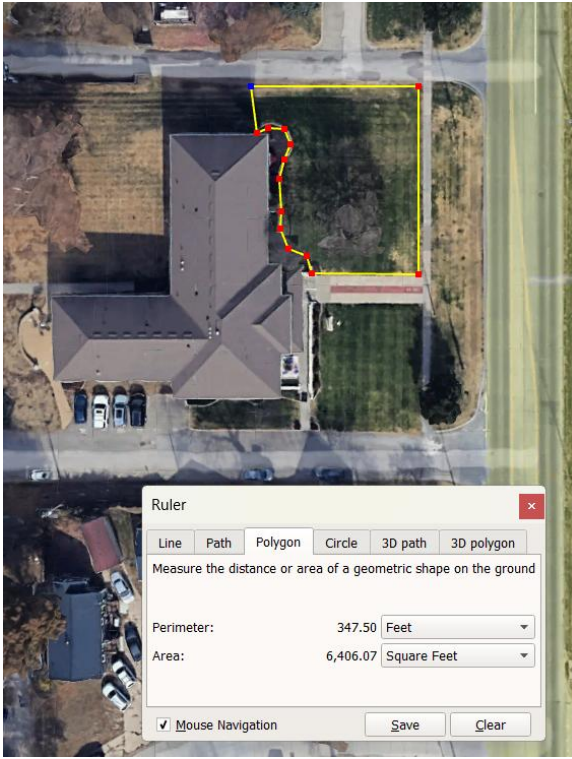
Ten Steps For Successful Lawn Planting & Overseeding This Fall:

As warm temperatures begin to break and rain chances increase in the forecast this fall, it is time to start planting or overseeding cool season lawns. Tall Fescue and Kentucky Bluegrass are the most common cool season lawns, and both are ideally planted in September. For most of Kansas, Tall Fescue lawns are the best choice of cool season lawn types, as they have the highest heat and drought tolerance.

To have a successful cool season lawn renovation this fall, follow these ten steps:



1. Start with a soil test. Soil tests will help to detect invisible soil problems, such as a lack of nutrients or extreme soil pH that will limit turfgrass growth. If any major changes to the soil are needed, it will be much easier to accomplish them before planting grass seed, rather than after. Keep in mind that soil tests take time, so plan ahead and allow time to process the results.



2. Measure the planting area and determine the amount of grass seed needed for planting. Websites or apps, such as Google Earth, can be helpful in determining the square footage of your property. When planting a new tall fescue lawn, plan for 6-8 pounds of grass seed for every 1,000 square feet. For new Kentucky bluegrass lawns, plan on 2-3 pounds of grass seed for every 1,000 square feet. If overseeding an existing lawn, reduce these grass seed totals by half to account for existing turfgrass and help prevent overcrowding.

3. Purchase a high-quality grass seed, which is free from weed seeds and other undesired crops. Purchase tall fescue blends whenever possible, which will contain 3-5 cultivars of tall fescue. By increasing the genetic variability of our lawns, we increase the chances of at least one cultivar succeeding in areas another cultivar may struggle (for example: with disease, in the shade, etc.).

4. Prepare the site's soil by grading, leveling, and amending soils, especially when planting a new lawn.
5. Control existing plant growth before planting to help reduce seedling competition for sunlight and water. Rake off or bag dead grass to help expose soil for planting. If overseeding an existing lawn, mow the grass shorter than usual (1-1.5 inches tall). If planting a new lawn, it is best to clear the area of weeds and any vegetative growth before planting. If herbicides are used to control weeds, ensure the product has a quick replanting interval listed on the label. Some weed killers restrict replanting new grass seed for several months after application and would not be a good choice for this time of year.
6. Break up the soil crust in order to achieve good soil-to-seed contact when planting. Seeds need good contact with the soil in order to access moisture and improve germination. This is especially important when weather conditions are hot and dry. In small areas, use a hand rake to break up the soil surface. For larger areas, consider using a machine such as a verticutter, slit seeder, or a core aerator.
7. Spread grass seed evenly over the entire area. For the best results, apply grass seed at partial rates from multiple directions (for example applying half the seed making north and south passes, and then using the other half of the seed in east to west applications). This process will use the same total amount of seed but provides more even seed distribution and reduces the risk of missing areas completely.



8. Provide a shallow planting depth for new grass seed. Ideally seeds should be planted only 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch deep. When using a broadcast spreader, consider lightly hand raking after spreading seed to achieve this depth or use a verticutter to make additional passes over the seeded area.
9. Water regularly and keep the soil surface moist. Water is going to be the most crucial step for even germination and survival. Seeds must be kept moist in order to germinate, and the upper soil layer must remain moist as roots develop on new seedlings. Once seeds have germinated, they must not be allowed to dry out or the seedlings will die. Water lightly and often, but do not keep the soil waterlogged. The frequency of watering will be determined by planting date and weather conditions. In late August to early September, watering may be needed 2-3 times per day. In late-September to early October, watering may be needed only every other day or so. The goal of watering is to keep the soil surface moist until seedlings establish.
10. Plan your first mowing when the grass seedlings reach a height of 3 inches. As grass seed continues to grow, gradually decrease waterings, down to only once or twice per week.



For more information about growing cool season lawns in Kansas, visit our respective publications for more planting and lawn care information:

- Tall Fescue Lawns: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/tall-fescue-lawns_MF736
- Kentucky Bluegrass Lawns: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/kentucky-bluegrass-lawns_MF2262

Trees & Shrubs:

Natural Needle Drop Occurring in Evergreens:



Each year many Kansas homeowners become concerned when their pine, spruce, arborvitae, and juniper trees begin turning yellow or brown on the inside. Fortunately, this is usually not a disease, and instead a completely normal process known as natural needle drop.

Evergreens do not keep the same needles forever. While evergreens vary in how long they retain their needles, most will keep the same needles for two to four years. Some evergreens, such as spruce, may hold on to their needles longer.

For all evergreens, as new growth emerges at the ends of branches, the older needles become increasingly shaded by new growth. With less sunlight these interior needles photosynthesize less effectively and become less productive. As a result, the tree sheds these interior needles to make room for newer growth.

When identifying natural needle drop in an evergreen, look at the older, inner needles closest to the trunk. These needles gradually change from green to yellow or brown before falling off during the late summer and fall months. While the inner needles turn brown, the newer needles on the branch tips remain green and healthy.

Natural needle drop can be especially noticeable after stressful weather conditions such as extreme heat, drought, excessive rainfall, or other environmental stresses. In some cases, natural needle drop may also occur at other times of year, especially following stress. Healthy trees may also display more noticeable needle drop two to three years after periods of vigorous growth, as well as during years when little new growth is produced.



With natural needle drop, the older, brown needles should naturally fall from the tree. It may take up to 2 to 3 months for this shedding to complete. Over time, the appearance of the tree gradually improves as the dead needles fall out and the plant produces new growth. Keep in mind that dead needles may get caught in lower branches as needles fall, prolonging the amount of time brown needles are visible in the tree.

If browning occurs in evergreens, homeowners should monitor where the discoloration occurs. When browning occurs only on the inner, older needles, then natural needle drop is the likely cause. However, if current-season growth is affected by browning and dropping needles or if branch dieback develops, the problem is likely not natural needle drop. These symptoms may indicate other disease or insect problems that merit further investigation.

[Visit our Pine Diseases in Kansas publication](https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/pine-diseases-in-kansas-tip-blight-dothistroma-needle-blight-and-pine-wilt_L722) for more information on natural needle drop, and other diseases commonly associated with pine trees in Kansas: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/pine-diseases-in-kansas-tip-blight-dothistroma-needle-blight-and-pine-wilt_L722

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