

# Horticulture Tips

## March 2004

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources  
Oklahoma State University

### Garden Tips for March!

*David Hillock*

- Remove excessive thatch from warm-season lawns. Dethatching, if necessary, should precede crabgrass control treatment. (F-6604)
- Broadleaf weeds can easily be controlled in cool-season lawns at this time with postemergent broadleaf herbicides. (F-6421)
- Apply preemergent crabgrass control chemicals to cool- and warm-season turfgrasses when forsythia flowers in spring (F-6421). Heed label cautions when using any weed killers near or in the root zone of desirable plantings.
- March is the second best time of the year to seed cool-season turfgrass; however, fall is the best time to plant. (F-6419)
- Cool-season lawns such as bluegrass, fescue and ryegrass may be fertilized now with the first application of the season. Usually, four applications of fertilizer are required per year, in March, May, October and November. (F-6420)
- Begin mowing cool-season grasses at 1 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches high. (F-6420)
- Cultivate annual flower and vegetable planting beds to destroy winter weeds.
- Apply mulch to control weeds in beds. Landscape fabric barrier can reduce the amount of mulch but can dry out and prevent water penetration. Thus, organic litter makes the best mulch.
- Prune roses just before growth starts and begin a regular disease spray program as the foliage appears. (F-6403 & F-7607)
- Prune spring flowering plants, if needed, immediately following their bloom period.
- Plant evergreen shrubs, balled and burlapped, and bare root trees and shrubs.
- Anthracnose control on sycamore, maple and oak should begin at bud swell. (F-7634).
- Diplodia Pine Tip blight control on pines begins at bud swell. (F-7618)
- Chemical and physical control of galls (swellings) on stems of trees should begin now. (F-7168 & F-7306)
- Dormant oil can still be applied to control mites, galls, overwintering aphids, etc. (F-7306)
- The 1st generation of Nantucket Pine Tip Moth appears at this time. Begin pesticide applications in late March. (F-7306)
- Control Eastern tent caterpillars as soon as the critters appear.
- Continue to plant strawberries, asparagus and other small fruit crops this month.
- Your cool-season vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, carrot, lettuce, onion, peas, spinach, turnips etc. should be planted by the middle of March (see table in February Hort Tips).

- Watch for cutworms that girdle newly planted vegetables during the first few weeks of establishment. Cabbage looper and cabbageworm insects should be monitored and controlled in the garden. (F-7313)
- Start your routine fruit tree spray schedule prior to bud break. (F-6235).
- Remove winter mulch from strawberries in early March. (F-6214)
- Avoid excessive walking and working in the garden when foliage and soils are wet.
- Start warm-season vegetable transplants indoors.
- Divide and replant overcrowded, summer and fall blooming perennials. Mow or cut back old liriopse and other ornamental grasses before new growth begins.

## **Perennial Plant of the Year**

*David Hillock*

The Perennial Plant Association named *Athyrium nipponicum* 'Pictum', Japanese Painted Fern, the 2004 Perennial Plant of the Year. Last year, OSU named the species, *Athyrium nipponicum*, as the Oklahoma Proven Perennial. This low-maintenance perennial is one of the showiest ferns for shade gardens. It is popular due to its hardiness nearly everywhere in the United States, except in the desert and northernmost areas in Zone 3. 'Pictum' grows 18 inches tall and as it multiplies can make a clump that is more than 2 feet wide. 'Pictum' produces 12- to 18-inch fronds that are a soft shade of metallic silver-gray with hints of red and blue. This lovely fern, which prefers partial to full shade, makes an outstanding combination plant for adding color, texture and habit to landscape beds and containers.

### Landscape Uses

The magnificent texture and color of the fronds electrify shady areas of the garden and make the fern a wonderful companion for a variety of shade plants. Japanese Painted Fern provides a nice contrast to other shade-loving perennials such as Hosta, Bleeding Heart, Columbine, Astilbe and Coral Bells. Another friendly companion plant for the Japanese Painted Fern is *Tiarella* (Foam Flower). Most any plant will make a great counterpart to the graceful, attractive and versatile *Athyrium nipponicum* 'Pictum'.

### Cultivation

This fern needs a well-drained, compost-rich soil and flourishes where moisture and humidity abound. The best frond color results in light shade. In the south, a few hours of morning sun will bring out the high colors. The colors are more intense in the spring or in cooler temperatures. Add 2-3 inches of compost or peat moss to the beds each spring or fall. This fern is extremely reliable when grown in the proper environmental conditions.

### Propagation

Propagation by the homeowner is easiest by spring or fall divisions. It is easy for a homeowner to buy the more colorful and uniform plants in the quantity needed or buy a few and divide the clumps yearly as needed. A well-grown plant can be separated in early spring into 3-4 divisions and replanted. Fertilize at one-half the rate of other perennials with an organic or time-release fertilizer.

### Hardiness

Grows in USDA Hardiness Zones 3-8

You can read more about the Perennial Plant of the Year by going to the following web site:  
<http://www.perennialplant.org/>

## **Royal Paulownia – The Wonder Tree! Or is it?!**

*David Hillock*

The Royal Paulownia, also called Princess Tree or Empress Tree, often shows up in newspaper inserts as the tree that has everything! However, a closer look at the tree reveals some attributes that may not be as desirable as we would like in a typical landscape setting. Royal Paulownia (*Paulownia tomentosa*) is similar in nature as the catalpa. It can get as high as 30 to 40 feet and grow more than 10 feet in one year. It sometimes produces large, foxglove-like flowers in the spring that are pale violet with darker spots and yellow stripes inside. Pictures of the flowers in the news releases can be alluring. Unfortunately the flower buds are often killed during the winter and the tree seldom flowers. The leaves of Royal Paulownia are large, 5 to 10 inches long and wide. The leaves may drop at irregular intervals so that there is always some clean-up necessary. Fruit is a capsule that can persist on the tree and may produce thousands of seed. Because the tree grows so fast, the wood is also relatively brittle and limbs and twigs can often be broken in wind and ice storms. Royal Paulownia apparently does not compete well with other plants and thus slowly declines in landscapes. The best place for this tree may be in parks or other large areas where risk of property damage or personal injury are less and clean up is not as much a concern.

## **2004 Oklahoma Proven Plants**

*David Hillock*

Needing to plant some new plants in the garden? Look for these Oklahoma Proven plants in the garden centers and nurseries this spring.

### **Tree: Shantung Maple - *Acer truncatum***

Sun Exposure: Full sun

Soil: Tolerates a wide range of conditions

Hardiness: USDA Zone 4

Shantung Maple is a drought tolerant small to medium-sized tree great for under power lines or in residential landscapes where there isn't room for a large tree. It grows quickly but typically only to 30 feet high. The leaves are star-shaped and typically emerge with an attractive purple tinge. This Asian native can have excellent fall color ranging from yellow to orange or red.

### **Shrub: Winter Jasmine - *Jasminum nudiflorum***

Sun Exposure: Full sun to part shade

Soil: Tolerates a wide range of conditions

Hardiness: USDA Zone 6

Winter Jasmine is often mistaken for forsythia but it flowers earlier and has a longer lasting floral display. It flowers as early as December before its glossy green leaves are formed. It can be pruned and used as a hedge but left untrimmed it will arch gracefully, forming a four foot high mound spreading to seven feet. Winter Jasmine requires very little care and is easily rejuvenated by cutting it to the ground every three to five years.

**Perennial: Autumn Sage - *Salvia greggii* 'Pink Preference'**

Sun Exposure: Full sun

Soil: Well-drained

Hardiness: USDA Zone 6

'Pink Preference' is a cultivar of Autumn Sage that was selected for its bright pink flowers. Like the species, it is a heat and drought tolerant perennial that starts blooming in the spring but blooms most in the autumn as other flowers in the garden start to fade. It forms a two to three foot mound and attracts hummingbirds and butterflies to the garden. Pruning to six inches high each spring will help keep Autumn Sage dense and full.

**Annual: Firebush - *Hamelia patens***

Sun Exposure: Full Sun

Soil: Well-drained

Hardiness: Use as an annual

This Central and South American native is a small tree when grown in the deep South but is best used as a heat tolerant annual in Oklahoma. The lush green foliage can produce a dense mound over three feet high in full sun and color is added by the interesting orange-red flowers and the reddish tinge on the leaf petioles. Firebush thrives in the summer heat and attracts hummingbirds and butterflies to the garden.

You can read more about these and previous years' Oklahoma Proven Plants by going to this web site: <http://oklahomaproven.okstate.edu/>

## **Two New Composting Fact Sheets Now Available**

*David Hillock*

Last year two new fact sheets were created to address composting for the home gardener. Backyard Composting in Oklahoma (F-1744) will replace Making a Compost Pile (F-6014). The new fact sheet is laid out in a Question and Answer format, addressing the most common questions related to composting. A table addressing problems that may be encountered serves as an excellent trouble-shooting guide. The publication also provides illustrations of several compost bin styles that are easily constructed or purchased from retail stores.

The second compost fact sheet deals with the ever-popular topic of vermicomposting or composting with worms. This topic or method of composting is popular among those who have small landscapes or those with no landscape such as apartment dwellers, but wish to compost kitchen scraps. It is also very popular in schools as it serves as an excellent, hands-on learning tool for elementary age children. This fact sheet, Vermicomposting – Composting with Worms

(F-1742), is also laid out in a Question and Answer format including information on how to construct a bin, how to manage it and a table for trouble-shooting problems.

To get copies of these new fact sheets order them online from the Print-On-Demand System or view and/or make copies from OSUextra. Go to [www.osuextra.com](http://www.osuextra.com), select view by department, then to the right select Horticulture and then click on General Horticulture.

## **Master Gardener Corner**

*David Hillock*

### **Southeast Regional Master Gardener Conference/Cruise – June 20-18, 2004**

It's not too late to "Come Ride the Gardening Wave" with the Southern Region Master Gardeners, June 24- 28, 2004. We will board the Carnival Holiday in New Orleans for a Caribbean cruise. We depart at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday and return to New Orleans by 8:00 a.m. Monday morning. Two days at sea will focus on gardening programs on board with specialists from the southern states. Gardening topics will cover the southern region with ideas on landscaping as well as maintenance and edible gardening. A stop in Cozumel will give you options for a garden tour or you can shop, snorkel or visit the ruins.

This is a great opportunity to visit with Master Gardeners from 13 southern states, plus relax and enjoy a tropical holiday. Leaving out of New Orleans gives us a more central location for the region, so travel to and from New Orleans is on your own. The prices quoted are for your room (double occupancy) all meals, port charges and we have added all gratuities. The only additional costs will be optional tours, your souvenirs and any alcoholic beverages. You will notice there is a slightly higher rate for Master Gardeners versus those just cruising – (family and friends). This will cover all program materials, hand-outs, etc. This cruise is open to non-master gardeners, and we encourage you to bring guests. There is always plenty to do on a cruise, and they won't be bored while you attend gardening sessions. We will leave the evenings open for you to enjoy on-board entertainment.

Please note there is a \$50 non-refundable deposit to hold a room. Visit our cruise website at [www.poetravel.com](http://www.poetravel.com) to find out more information about cruise pricing, trip itinerary, shore excursions, payment schedules, travel insurance and more.

Register today at [www.poetravel.com](http://www.poetravel.com), click on Meetings & Incentives...then go to Master Gardener Cruise or call Teresa at Poe Travel 1-800-727-1960 / 501-376-4171. Poe Travel hours of operation: 8:30am – 5:00pm CST / Monday – Friday.

### **2004 Oklahoma Master Gardener Continued Training Summer Conference! – June 4, 2004**

The Kay County Master Gardeners are hosting this year's Summer Continued Training Conference in Ponca City at the Pioneer Technology Center. Speakers and topics include Melynda Hickman, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation – Landscaping for Wildlife; David Keathly – Treasures of Northern Oklahoma; Lou Anella, Dept. of Horticulture and L.A. – okPLANTid and okPLANTtrees web sites; Al Sutherland, Assistant Extension Specialist -

Mesonet – A Weather Toolkit for the Home Gardener; Garden Design Magazine (speaker to be determined) - 50 Ways to Wow Your Garden; and a panel of extension specialists and horticulturists to answer gardening questions.

The conference will take place the day before the Ponca City Herb Fest so you can get a full weekend of gardening fun if you would like to stick around and participate in their events as well.

Hope to see you all there! Contact: David Hillock, Master Gardener Coordinator, Oklahoma State University, Dept. of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture, 360 Ag Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078. E-mail: [hillock@okstate.edu](mailto:hillock@okstate.edu); phone: 405-744-5158.

## **Upcoming Horticulture Events**

### **Spring Dead Spot Conference**

April 28, 2004

OSU Botanical Gardens, Stillwater

### **Turfgrass and Nursery Field Day**

May 20, 2004

OSU Botanical Gardens, Stillwater

### **Integrated Pest Management for Landscape Professionals**

May 25, 2004

OSU, Stillwater Campus

### **State Master Gardener Conference**

June 4, 2004

Pioneer Technology Center, Ponca City

### **OPGA Annual Meeting**

June 11-13, 2004

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***Oklahoma Gardening Summer Gardenfest***

June 12, 2004

OSU Botanical Gardens, Stillwater

The keynote speaker will be Landscape Architect Tim Thoelecke from Garden Concepts, Inc. in Glenview, Illinois. His presentation will be on "Garden Makeovers."

**Greenhouse Production Shortcourse**

June 15-17, 2004

OSU-Oklahoma City Campus

**Horticultural Therapy Conference**

Date - TBA

Stillwater

**Multi-State Plant Materials Conference**

September 22-23, 2004

Holiday Inn, Stillwater

**Nursery/Greenhouse Trade Show and Convention**

October 8-9, 2004

Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City

**Tree Care Issues Conference**

November 3, 2004

OSU Botanical Gardens Educational Building, Stillwater

For more information about upcoming events, please contact Stephanie Larimer at 405-744-5404 or [steph@okstate.edu](mailto:steph@okstate.edu).