

## The Grapevine

### Preventing Damage to plants this winter

The last week of cooler weather has been a welcome relief after the heat of the summer but the cooler weather is also a reminder that winter is coming. When I looked at the forecast for the coming week it looks like we are going to have a warm start to the week and on tap to receive some much-needed moisture later in the week. As we enjoy the fall days it's also a time to get some tasks done to protect our trees and shrubs from environmental and animal damage this winter. As the phrase goes "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" and that definitely holds true for winter damage of plants whether caused by the weather or by a furry creature.

One of the most common issues I get calls about are frost cracks on trees. Maple trees are the most likely culprits however frost cracks can occur on ash, apple, crabapple, sycamore or any thin barked tree. Frost cracks occur in late spring or early fall typically on the south west side of the tree. During the day the sun warms the bark and underlying wood causing the sap to flow and the tissue to expand, then at night the temperature drops suddenly. The outer bark cools faster than the inner tissue and tries to contract. This difference in contraction damages the bark and the bark separates from the inner wood. This damage can be visible immediately or it might not show up for several years when the dead bark peels back in that area. Once the damage is done the tree will have to heal itself over years if it heals at all. There are a couple ways to prevent frost cracks. The first way is to avoid fertilizing or pruning trees late in the growing season to prevent active growth. In the fall wrap the trunk with tree wrap in the fall to help prevent the damage. If you do end up with frost cracks on trees provide a clean wound area. If the crack is clean with neat edges and no loose hanging bark, leave the tree alone but if there is a ragged tear trim off the ragged bark or remove the hanging pieces and allow it to heal on its own. Do not use wound treatment on the bark.



The other day I was cleaning my garden and a rabbit jumped out of the tomatoes. In the winter rabbits and other small furry critters are going to come looking for food. As we get the garden ready for winter there are some steps we should take to keep the small furry critters from damaging plants. Mice tend to burrow in mulch and other debris so avoid piling those around thin barked trees. To prevent rabbits from chewing on trees use a 2-foot cylinder of 1-inch chicken mesh or a spiral plastic wrap around the trunk. This wire cylinder can be left on around the tree all year long as long as the wire doesn't cut into the tree but the plastic needs removed every spring.

As our perennials and other plants go dormant in the fall it's time to start mulching sensitive plants in to prevent the crowns from freezing or the freeze/thaw cycle heaving the plant out of the ground. As the leaves fall from the trees they make a wonderful mulch in flower beds around perennials and shrubs. I would also wait to cut perennials back for the winter, unless you had disease issues this year, till temperatures warm up in the spring. This residue will help trap leaves around the crowns of the plants and those debris are also where beneficial insects can overwinter. Just a reminder that you can keep some leaves on your lawn through the winter but if they start to pile up in one location try to spread them out to prevent the grass from being killed in that area.

Fall has been gorgeous this year and I'm hoping that the nice temperatures stick around for a while. I plan to take advantage of these warm and dry days to get caught up on some projects around my garden so I'm ready when winter does decide to show up. Enjoy the beautiful fall weather and I hope that you receive some much needed moisture over the coming week. Happy Growing!!

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### Plant of the Week-

This week's plant is the American Elm. This native of the United States was once the most iconic street tree of towns across the eastern 2/3 of the United States however Dutch Elm disease led to a rapid decline in this once widely used tree. Luckily there have been several resistant varieties that are helping this tree make a comeback in the landscape. A full-grown American Elm can reach 60 to 80 feet in height. There are three different shapes that American elms can grow, the "vase shape" that is stereotypical of most American Elms (see photo at right), an "oak shape" and a narrow form with short branches covering the entire trunk. The dark green, glossy leaves are three to six inches long and one to three inches wide with serrated edges. The leaves turn a brilliant yellow in the fall. Though Dutch Elm Disease has wiped out many American Elms across the United States there have been several resistant varieties that are available on the market. Some of the most common include "Princeton", "Valley Forge", "New Harmony", and a variety selected out of Wichita called "Jackson." Unfortunately, the American Elm will always be a reminder that we should avoid monocultures in our landscaping and street trees. Though the American Elm suffered a major setback it is slowly making a resurgence due to resistant varieties.



### Houseplant of the Week-



This week we are highlighting the versatility of the Snake Plant. A tough and forgiving house plant was recently reclassified from the genus *Sansevieria* and is now in the same family (*Draceana*) as corn plant and lucky bamboo. There are approximately 70 different species of snake plant that originated in Africa, southern Asia and Madagascar and they come a wide variety of heights, leaf structure, color and shapes. Snake plants can be less than six inches tall or over four feet depending on variety. Some of the most unique varieties include the birds nest type plants that are very low growing (middle plant in photo) and the varieties that have uniquely variegated leaves including "Bantel's Sensation" and "Sayuri". This plant is a wonderful option for a beginner looking for an easy to care for plant.

They need a well-drained soil and you should only water them when they are dry. The easiest way to kill a snake plant is to overwater it. They grow best in bright indirect light but they tolerate very low light areas they simply grow slower. If you are looking for a cool plant to fit in any room there is probably a snake plant that will work.

### Reminders-

- Wait to cut frost killed perennials, unless diseases were present, till spring to provide a home for beneficial insects overwinter.
- Once you are done with tools for the fall be sure to clean them and store properly so they are ready to use in the spring.
- Soil test your garden or flower bed spots.
- Winterize your lawn mower before you put it up for the year. Be sure to sharpen the blades or have the mower serviced before storing for the winter
- Drain your rain barrels and store for winter. Once the night temperatures are consistently around 30 degrees you should drain and clean your rain barrels for the winter.
- Plant spring blooming bulbs
- Check out this video of the week on cleaning up your yard for the fall: <https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/cleaning-up-your-garden-in-the-fall> -

## Upcoming Events

- **November 1, 2022: Winter Greens and Winter Blues**

Houseplants have been rapidly growing in popularity over the last couple of years as people navigated their way through a global pandemic. Not only do houseplants add some beauty and joy to a house they also create an oasis of calm that can help fight seasonal depression. Join Calla Edwards and Bonnie Brewer during Life Enrichment at the Butler County Community College to talk about caring for houseplants, how they can help with seasonal depression and some other ways to beat the winter blues this year. We will be meeting in the Hubbard Welcome Center at 9 am.

- **November 2, 2022: Wildlife Damage Prevention and Control in the Lawn and Garden**

Have your prized vegetables and beautiful landscapes ever become an all-you-can-eat buffet for local wildlife? Learn how to identify the squirrels, rabbits, deer, gophers, or other wildlife that may be causing problems, and better understand how to prevent their damage. Join Dr. Ricketts, as he shares practical tips to prevent and control common wildlife damage issues. For more information or to register [click here](#).

- **December 7, 2022: Accessible Gardening for All**

Gardening is a passion for so many people, however due to physical challenges, many people find themselves limited or unable to garden. Join Calla Edwards, Butler County Horticulture Extension Agent to learn tips, tricks, and ways to make your gardening experience adaptable for everyone. For more information or to register [click here](#).