

# K-STATE

Research and Extension

Butler County

September 8th, 2025

## In this Issue:

- Benefits of Rainwater
- Why do Leaves Turn Color?
- Carpenter Ants
- What to Do with Fall Leaves
- Cucumber, Tomato, and Avocado Salad

## Address:

Kansas State Research and Extension  
Butler County  
206 N Griffith St., Ste A  
El Dorado, KS 67042

## Phone Number:

316-321-9660

## Email:

[callae@ksu.edu](mailto:callae@ksu.edu)

## Office Hours:

Monday- Thursday  
7:30 am- 5:00 PM

Friday  
7:30 am- 11:30 am



# The Grapevine

## Benefits of Rainwater for Houseplants by Chris Stuhlsatz

Using rainwater for your houseplants is a simple yet highly effective way to enhance their growth and vitality. Unlike tap water, which often contains chemicals like chlorine and fluoride, rainwater is naturally soft and free from these additives. This means your plants can absorb nutrients more efficiently, leading to healthier foliage and more vibrant blooms.

Rainwater is also slightly acidic, mimicking the natural environment in which many houseplants thrive. This acidity can help maintain an optimal pH level in the soil, promoting better nutrient uptake. Also, rainwater contains essential minerals like nitrogen, a key nutrient for plant growth.

Collecting and using rainwater is not only beneficial for your plants but also environmentally friendly. It reduces your dependence on treated water, conserving this precious resource. Plus, it's free! All you need is a simple rain barrel or container to collect it.

In summary, watering your houseplants with rainwater can lead to more vigorous, healthier plants and a more sustainable lifestyle. Your plants will thank you with lush leaves and abundant blooms!



# Why do Leaves Turn Color?



Fall has officially arrived, and surprisingly, it actually feels like fall so far this week. While some very stressed trees are turning colors early, most haven't started changing colors yet. Fall is one of the most beautiful seasons as the leaves turn brilliant colors and the trees begin to shed their leaves for the growing season. Have you ever wondered why leaves change color in the fall? Let's find out!

Most of the year, the leaves on trees are green because of the green pigment in chlorophyll that allows them to produce the energy needed to grow, bloom, and produce fruit. The other colors, except red and purple, needed for leaves to color in the fall are already present, but masked by the chlorophyll. The red and purple pigments are produced after the chlorophyll is destroyed. As fall progresses and certain weather conditions are met, the leaves will develop an abscission layer at the base of the petiole, where the leaf attaches to the stem, which prevents sugars from being transported down the trunk to the roots for storage. As the sugars accumulate in the leaves, the high concentration causes more intense colors. Certain trees, such as oaks and maples, naturally have more fall color than others, and these types of trees tend to be more common in Michigan, New England, and other parts of the country than in Kansas. This makes it appear our native trees do not color as well; however, they have a different range of colors.

The weather does play a role in how well a tree colors in the fall. In years where we have hot and dry summers, we won't have the fall color when compared to years like this year, when it's been relatively wet with milder weather. Other weather conditions, such as cloudy days and warm nights, heavy rains in the spring or fall, and frosts, will also impact the amount of fall color we have and how long it hangs around. Try to enjoy the cooler days and the start of fall color while you have a chance.

## Insect of the Week- Carpenter Ants

This week's insect is the carpenter ant. Carpenter ants are relatively common in Kansas. They get their name because they tend to build their nests in wood. Unlike termites, carpenter ants don't feed on wood; they use it as a place to live. These are the largest ants in Kansas, with adults ranging in size from  $\frac{1}{4}$ " for workers to  $\frac{3}{4}$ " for queens, depending on the ant species. They range from reddish brown to black, with some species having a red front and a black rear. The easiest way to identify these ants is by the ring of tiny hairs at the tip of the abdomen. Carpenter ants will burrow into soft, moist wood to establish their nests. They prefer wood that has already started to decay; however, they will also excavate into perfectly sound wood. In houses, these ants build "galleries" to rear young. These galleries are formed without regard for the grain of the wood and tend to follow the softer parts of the wood. An indication you have carpenter ant issues is the sawdust they eject from their galleries. Houses near wooded areas are more likely to have problems with carpenter ants than those away from trees. In trees, carpenter ants are taking advantage of wood that has already started to decay. They tend to be a symptom of an already existing issue in a tree rather than being the cause of the damage. Finding their nest is the first step to controlling the ants in a home. The first places to inspect are areas affected by water seepage, such as window sills, roofs, porches, posts, columns, and rotten stumps, logs, or trees nearby. Apply pyrethroid products directly to the nest according to the label requirements to eliminate the parent colony. It's also recommended that spot treatments and insecticide spray be applied around the perimeter of buildings to prevent the infestation of the area by a new colony. Be sure to fix the issue that also caused the rotten or damp wood.



# What to Do with Fall Leaves



This year is setting up to be beautiful for fall color, and with all our moisture, trees didn't drop as many leaves early on as they usually might have. This year, we may have a bumper crop of leaves to use in your lawn and garden. I know that many of my leaves will end up replenishing the mulch layer in my garden that has broken down or been washed away by the flooding earlier this year. There are many benefits to utilizing the leaves in your landscape; however, too many can and will kill the lawn or desirable plants. Even if you don't have trees in your yard, there will likely be some leaves that are blown in from your neighbors. Before the leaves fall is a good time to plan for what to do with your leaves, whether you are using

them around your house or giving them away for someone else to use.

Falling leaves are an excellent source of organic matter to replenish nutrients in soil and improve the soil structure, but in a lawn setting, they can quickly create a mat that will kill the grass underneath. One of the best ways to utilize leaves in your lawn is to use a method called mulch mowing. As you get a thin layer of leaves on top of your grass, one to two inches, not 6-8" of leaves, mow your lawn with the bagger off. The mower will chop the leaves into small bits that can fall through the grass to land on the soil surface. These pieces will break down over the winter and add to the soil. You can tell you have been successful with mulch mowing when you look behind you and see mostly grass with a few leaves. If you see mostly leaves, you probably waited too long. If you have many trees in your yard, this may have to be done multiple times a week when the leaves fall the most.

Leaves are an excellent addition to any compost pile. For the best results, mulch the leaves in smaller pieces before putting them in the compost pile, allowing them to break down faster. You can add mulched leaves directly to the garden and leave them on the surface or till them into the soil to break down for next year. Leaves can be an excellent mulch around perennials and other flower beds. They help insulate the soil and protect the delicate crowns of tender plants from the freeze/thaw cycles we see in the spring. Leave some leaves sitting for native pollinators and other beneficial insects to overwinter. Many of our good bugs utilize leaves and standing plant material to survive till next spring. No matter how you use your leaves, plan what to do with them to avoid sending them to the landfill this fall.

## Video of the Week



### Seed Saving From the Garden

Seed saving is a fun way to enjoy gardening without breaking the bank. Most plants produce seeds that can be saved from one year to the next; however, not all seeds are equally suited for saving. Jesse will discuss the merits of seed saving, the different types of flowers and seeds, and which plants are most suited for seed saving. Watch the video on the [Garden Hour website](#).



## Upcoming Events

**October 1<sup>st</sup>**-Keys to Successful Community Garden Spaces

**November 5<sup>th</sup>**- Climate Resilient Gardens

**December 3<sup>rd</sup>**- Gifts for Gardeners

### Upcoming Events:

**September 10<sup>th</sup> at 12:15 pm**- Bring your lunch and learn about Composting at the Andover Library

**September 15<sup>th</sup> at 12:15 pm**- Cleaning up the Fall Garden at Lori's EmporiYum Laboratory

**September 17<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm**- Season Extension in the Garden at the Benton Community Center

# Cucumber, Tomato, and Avocado Salad



This Cucumber, Tomato, and Avocado Salad is a fresh serving at any meal. This recipe serves four. Make it pop! Thaw frozen shrimp to add to this dish. Buy fresh fruits and vegetables in small amounts to prevent food waste. Please keep it simple. Buy precut onions to save your eyes and your time. It also works with tomatoes!

### Ingredients

- 1 cucumber, diced
- 4 Roma tomatoes, diced
- ½ onion, diced
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 lemon, juiced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 3 avocados, diced

### Directions

1. Mix cucumber, tomatoes, and onion in a large bowl.
2. Toss vegetables with olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and pepper.
3. Add diced avocado just before serving.

Recipe Source: [Alabama A&M and Auburn University Extension](#)

### All Green Thumbs by Jason Nocera

www.nichecartoons.com





# LUNCH & LEARN

Bring your lunch and join Horticulture Agent, Calla Edwards, over the lunch hour during our monthly Lunch & Learn Program. This will be held over the lunch hour and will cover a variety of horticulture topics.

**September 10<sup>th</sup>**  
**12:15-12:45 p.m.**

**Andover Public Library**  
1511 E Central Ave  
Andover, KS

## **September Topic: Compost Pile**

Fall means cooler weather, apple cider, and, of course, dealing with all of the falling leaves. What can we do with all of these leaves? Just like anything else that is organic, they can be broken down by composting. Join Calla in learning about what else you can compost, and why everyone should build their own compost pile!

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service  
K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



# LUNCH & LEARN

Bring your lunch and join Horticulture Agent, Calla Edwards, over the lunch hour during our monthly Lunch & Learn Program. This will be held over the lunch hour and will cover a variety of horticulture topics.

**September 15<sup>th</sup>**  
**12:15-12:45 p.m.**

**Lori's EMPORIUM!**  
1604 Custer Lane  
Augusta, KS

## **September Topic: Putting the Garden to Rest**

The gardening season is winding down, but there are still a few steps to take in our lawns, gardens, and flowerbeds to help us be prepared for the spring growing season. Join Calla Edwards to get a jump start on that fall gardening to-do list.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service  
K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.