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A guide to spring planting

By M.J. Van Deventer
Staff Writer



Thinking of planting your spring garden? You probably will want to have the most beautiful yard in your neighborhood, and all it takes is time, money and expertise. You supply the time and money. The gardening gurus of Oklahoma provide the tips that make creating and planting a fabulous garden a breeze.

There is a bit of science involved in designing and planting a spring garden. You have to know the planting zone you live in. Seed packages can usually tell you that. They also tell you the window of opportunity for planting. How deep to plant varies with every variety. It's elementary garden information, but if you are a novice gardener, this is essential knowledge that helps lead to gardening success.

So, what are the showstoppers — the superstars — for spring? What are the plants that will make people say, "Wow! Look at that garden," when they drive by your home.

For Oklahoma City, some trees, plants and flowers are safe bets, although the recent ice storm mutilated or killed many of the beautiful mature trees in almost every neighborhood.

People who are having to replant or watch a tree try to recover from its severe amputation will need patience as they await a tree's return to health and beauty. Patience is a personality trait required of anyone who gardens.

Tiny, dainty crocuses, planted in the fall, are the first to herald spring. In "Best Garden Plants for Oklahoma," author Steve Owens notes, "They often appear, as if by magic, in full bloom beneath the melting snow." Less well-known are the autumn crocuses, which provide a similar show just as people are thinking about fall bulb planting.

As the spring crocuses fade from the landscape, daffodils and tulips begin to emerge from the ground or their container gardens, telling the world spring has arrived. The floral beauty of the redbud and Bradford pear will not be far behind. These, along with pansies and irises — bearded or otherwise — are the stalwarts of the spring garden.

But vintage plants appear to be making a comeback in Oklahoma gardens. Among the superstars this spring will be oakleaf hydrangea, a rather old-fashioned plant that likes to lie in woodland or shaded areas.

According to Steve Dobbs, author of the Oklahoma Gardener's Guide, "You must make room for oakleaf hydrangeas in your landscape. This plant offers season-long interest for the shade garden or east-exposure landscapes." Its blue and white flowers are also showing up in many more arrangements from florists. They add a rich fullness to any garden setting or floral bouquet and a perfect contrast to colorful roses, daisies, Dutch irises and chrysanthemums, eternally popular garden attractions.

Among other seasonal favorites are crape myrtles, which bloom in lacelike pinks, reds, whites and lilacs and survive with minimal care.

Redbuds and Bradford pear trees are at their peak of beauty when they bloom in early spring. After that, they have to take a backseat to summer's flowering beauties: geraniums, hostas, impatiens, begonias, snapdragons, daisies, zinnias, periwinkles, lantanas and petunias.

What's new and hot in the garden?

If you want to know what's on the cutting edge, visit the trial gardens at Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City. Haddon Howard shepherds this garden, which experiments with plants and brings new varieties to bloom. He treats these plants as if they were his children.

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Plant picks
Award-winning landscape architect Bill Renner of Bill Renner Design lists these picks for low maintenance and gorgeous color:

Esperanza: Full sun, has bright yellow clusters from May through November. This annual grows 3-4 feet tall.

Antherium: Partial shade and no afternoon sun. This tropical makes a stunning statement as a patio container plant. Silky pink flowers bloom all summer with dark green arrowhead-shaped leaves.

Vitex shrub: Bluish lavender flower spikes are in abundance from June to the first frost. This medium to large deciduous shrub grows 3-12 feet tall. It is very drought-tolerant and does well in poor soils.

Knockout and Double Knockout roses: These roses need little maintenance and bloom from April to early frost. They are available in single or double flower and several colors including red, pink and white.

Carpet rose: A low-growing groundcover-like shrub that grows to 1-2 feet tall. It is very low-maintenance, drought-tolerant and thrives in full sun.

Dragon Wing begonia: This is the ultimate begonia for dazzling color. It is best used in containers or a raised planter. It blooms from April to frost. Dragon Wings prefer partial sun. This is a strong and fast-growing plant reaching up to 3 feet.

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