



# Alberta Horticultural Association

October 2020  
The official  
quarterly newsletter  
of the AHA

## President's Message

Another summer in the books. It was another weird one, but horticulturally, I think that we came out ahead.

By all reports, peoples' interest in gardening and horticultural pursuits was significantly higher than in recent years. Many garden centres and greenhouses reported being sold out of product well in advance of seasonal norms, and many were constantly scrambling to get more product in stock. People weren't just buying bedding plants and baskets. They were buying loads of vegetable bedding plants, as well as other stock. Lots of people spent more time in their yards and gardens than in normal years, either because they were working from home, or faced temporary unemployment. There were many new gardeners, which is tremendous. I think that if that interest can be maintained (and perhaps nurtured) going forward,

it represents a significant opportunity to refresh and rejuvenate our groups, clubs, and organizations.

What are you doing in your club/group to support and keep up the momentum? What are your future plans? What do you think that the AHA can do to support you in all of this?

COVID-19 will make it challenging to meet the demand that it itself created, but if you are willing to get creative, you might find yourself with a previously untapped pool of new and interested members. Webinars or online discussions are great options, particularly with people being online more. Host virtual Q&A sessions for area gardeners or invite questions to be submitted (and then followed up on directly). The sky is the limit.

COVID did cause most of us to shut down many activities, but you still could find a few events

that managed to adapt adequately to meet the enhanced safety requirements. I was able to take in one during the late summer (see ADGS Flower Show), and I tried to find ways to embrace all things horticultural in the spring (see Horticulture Therapy – Virtual Scavenger Hunt. <https://spencer-hort-solutions.ca/horticulture-therapy-virtual-scavenger-hunt/>).

While we might not have had an AHA conference or AGM this summer (due to COVID-19), the AHA executive continues work to raise the profile of horticulture in Alberta. You can help by sharing what you are doing, so we can share it more widely.

Until the next time, on behalf of the entire AHA Executive, I wish you all the best.

Robert Spencer  
AHA President

Gardening Tips to Share	2-3
Promote Your Society	4
Green Industry Conference	4
Education Program	4
Alberta Dahlia & Gladiolus Society	4



[www.ABHortA.ca](http://www.ABHortA.ca)

### Organic Master Gardener Program

The OMG program is offered through the Stony Plain Heritage Agricultural Society at the Stony Plain Multicultural Heritage Centre. This program is offered in cooperation with Gaia College and SOUL (Society of Organic Urban Land-care).

The program runs from February to October for a total of 27 classes. Most classes are Wednesday evenings, with some Saturday sessions.

<https://multicentre.org/organic-master-gardeners/>

## Gardening Tips to Share with New Gardeners

2020 was a difficult year, but one bright light amidst a lot of anxiety was a big surge (or maybe a resurgence?) of an interest in gardening. It was wonderful to see many new gardeners enter the arena this season, as well as lots of former gardeners regain their interest. However, those gardeners are going to be largely inexperienced and will probably have many questions. The more success they have with their plants and yards the more likely they will be to continue gardening. Take a few minutes to ask that new gardener in your neighbourhood about the past season and you may have a chance to share some of your hard-earned wisdom to help these new gardeners be successful. Here are 15 common, fall-focused gardening tips:

**1. When are crops ready to harvest?** How do you know when something is ready for picking and when it should be left a bit longer? Short season crops, such as leafy greens, are pretty simple, but what about more complicated crops like potatoes, tomatoes, sweet corn, broccoli, or cauliflower? The way plants mature varies, so each crop should be carefully considered. A few days extra in the life of a snap/snow pea can mean the difference between a tasty, sugary garden delight and a tough, starchy mess.

Potatoes can be harvested as soon as tubers begin to form (often signalled by the plant flowering) and any time after that. Sweet corn is tricky, but having the silks dried down, the kernels plump, and the ear filled out are good indicators. Broccoli florets should have dense heads, but there should not be any opening or separation of the immature flower buds.

**2. Ripening – which ripen after?** Some crops can ripen after being harvested, while others simply soften and deteriorate. Produce that is physiologically mature (meaning it is “grown up”, even if it is not fully ripe) will typically continue to develop colour, flavour, and softness after picking, but will not likely increase in sweetness a great deal. Some crops that ripen after harvest include tomato, melon, squash, and pumpkin.

**3. How to store produce?** Every crop has optimum storage conditions that maximize post-harvest lifespan. The main conditions that we attempt to control are temperature and relative humidity (RH). Store most vegetables as close to 0°C as possible, without freezing, and at as high a humidity as possible (up to 95% RH), without condensation forming. The exceptions to this are warm season and fruiting vegetables, such as tomato, pepper, squash, and pumpkin. These crops prefer temperatures in the low teens, and drier air (about 65% RH).

**4. Top killing and potatoes.** A couple of weeks prior to harvesting potatoes, their tops should be killed (naturally or manually) to encourage a toughening of the skin which reduces damage at harvest. This step is not needed if the potatoes will be immediately consumed.

**5. Which bulbs to dig? Which to leave?** Not all perennial plants that come from underground plant parts (e.g. bulbs, corms, or tubers) can be left in the soil for the winter. In our harsh Prairie climate, temperatures are just too cold for some tender plants to survive. Others are adapted and can be left, coming back each spring.

Tulip and lily bulbs can safely be left in the garden. But dahlia tubers and gladiolus corms must be dug up each fall. After the tops have started to die down, prior to a hard frost, dig the plants and spread them out to dry down in a cool, dry location. Store them in a cold, protected location.

**6. Amending the soil / When to add compost.** Fall is a great time to dig in organic matter, such as well-rotted manure and compost, to build up the soil for the following season. During the winter they start breaking down, with plant available nutrients more available in the spring.

When adding amendments like compost be sure to understand where it came from and if there are any potential issues: e.g. Was it exposed to herbicides? Is it not fully composted and might be full of weeds, diseases, or other pests?

**7. What can you plant in fall?** Spring is often cool and wet, delaying getting into the garden as early as we might like. Many plants will grow at cool temperatures and may be successfully fall-seeded. Having crops like spinach and garlic in place early in the season means there is more time for growing. The ground should be cool enough that the seeds won't start to germinate, aim for 5°C or cooler. If daytime temperatures are staying in the low single digits, but the ground isn't frozen, things should be fine.

Many perennials can be divided and planted in late summer or early fall, provided there is time (approximately 4-6 weeks) for some light root growth and shutdown before winter conditions arrive. Trees and shrubs can also be planted in late summer and early fall, provided there is sufficient moisture in the plant to prevent winter desiccation injury. If you can't or don't get to it in the fall, early spring will be just fine.

**8. Fall perennial care (haircuts, clean up, etc.)** Many gardeners prefer to clean up the garden prior to winter. Remove anything that is dead or in poor condition, apply mulches, remove debris, and trim seed heads and excess foliage. Some gardeners save these tasks until spring, leaving seed heads to feed the birds or provide winter interest. Woody stems trap snow and provide some insulation. Bergenia and Japanese Spurge are examples of evergreen perennials and should not be cut back.

**9. Getting the yard ready for winter.** Mow lawns one final time once growth has stopped (after a hard cold snap). Raise the deck of the mower to make the cut a bit higher. Rake and remove tree leaves so that there are no big, heavy piles which will kill the grass underneath. Some gardeners pile leaves in flower beds for insulation, however, under wet conditions they will compress and hold moisture and low temperatures.

**10. Fall Watering.** There are many schools of thought on how much water should be applied to plants in the fall, just before the soil freezes. Some plants need to be topped up, while others need to just go to sleep without being confused by lots of water. Generally, plants should be well hydrated (particularly large trees and shrubs), but should not be soaked down constantly. Fall tends to be wetter, so just keep an eye on the weather and water as needed. For more details, read the blog article late season watering practices. (<https://spencer-hort-solutions.ca/late-summer-watering/>)

**11. What to do with dead plants and debris.** Dead plants and debris may be composted and added back to the soil with great success. However, if debris is full of diseased material, it may be best to dispose of it elsewhere. Alternatively, a covered compost pile will protect from spores continuing to be produced and dispersing. This is a concern for late blight of potatoes and tomatoes. Succulent legumes or cucurbits with heavy levels of powdery mildew are generally best put into the garbage rather than being composted.

Pruned material can be chipped, burned, or removed. Black knot galls and fire-blight infected material should be removed from the site. For more details, read the blog article Late Season Pest Management Strategies (<https://spencer-hort-solutions.ca/getting-some-late-kicks-in-a-k-a-end-of-season-pest-management-strategies/>).

**12. Fall weed control.** By the end of summer, weeding might be something that you are done with, but fall is a good time to take a bite out of weeds. Collect and remove as many weeds as possible. Some perennial weeds (such as Canada Thistle) can be best controlled with spot sprays in the late summer and early fall. The more weeds (and their seeds) that you can remove in fall, the fewer there are to deal with the following year.

**13. Fall garden preparations for spring success.** Fall tillage can help to incorporate the debris left from the previous crop, smooth things out somewhat, and get a start on having a better quality seed bed the following year. Leaving a rough soil surface, as this may help to trap snow, improves spring soil moisture.

**14. When to prune?** Pruning is something that can be done in fall, and certainly over winter. There are lots of reasons to prune, as well as considerations based on the species of tree or shrub that you are dealing with. Have a look at the following article for details. <http://abhorts.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2015-tree-pruning-tips-sheet.pdf>

**15. Record keeping and mapping.** The end of the growing season is a great time for reflecting on what went well and what went poorly. If you wait too long, it is easy to forget details and then have a repeat of the issues year after year. Ideally, keep records throughout the growing season, but sum it up at the end of the season if you did not do so earlier.

For any part of your yard, fall is also a great time for making plans for the following season, particularly while you remember what was planted where, and where issues occurred.

*Rob Spencer, Spencer Horticultural Solutions*

## Promote Your Society

Did you know you can post your events on the AHA website? Click the "Contact Us" link, include the details you'd like publicized, and send it off.

You can even attach a photo, an event poster, or other relevant information. We'll post it to [www.ABHortA.ca](http://www.ABHortA.ca) asap.

Also, why not share notes or ideas on what you are doing as a club/society/group? Getting ideas and learning from other people and groups is always useful.

  
[www.ABHortA.ca](http://www.ABHortA.ca)

## Green Industry Show & Conference

The annual Green Industry Show & Conference (GISC) is the largest trade show and conference in Western Canada and has gone fully virtual for 2020. This is a special opportunity for students and interested home gardeners to participate.

For 45 years landscape, nursery, garden centre, greenhouse, turf, and tree care industry professionals have come together at GISC to participate in industry-leading workshops and seminars and to check out the latest products and services available to the horticultural industry.

The \$50.00 registration provides full access to all educational sessions, keynote sessions, and even the trade show floor. The live sessions run November 18-20, 2020, featuring more than 27 presentations by industry experts from across Canada and the US. Participants also have full access to the virtual sessions until January 20, 2021. Details at the GISC website. <https://pheedloop.com/gisc2020/site/home/>

## Education Program

Has your Garden Society used the AHA's Education Program? Funding is still available towards speaker costs, even virtual speakers. Consider partnering or involving other clubs in your area when bringing in a speaker and do joint advertising. Access the forms on the AHA website and speak to your AHA District Representative.

## Report on the ALBERTA DAHLIA AND GLADIOLUS SOCIETY (ADGS) Flower Show

The ADGS went ahead with their annual flower show and tours of their Trial Gardens on August 21-22, 2020, hosted by Marilyn and Lorne McArthur outside of Red Deer.

The weather was mostly beautiful and while the crowds weren't huge, those that came out were treated to a feast of blooms.



Dahlia and glad exhibits



Sunflower & kale arrangement



Dahlia and glad exhibits



ADGS trial beds, Red Deer

Visit the ADGS website for more beautiful photos and to learn about the Society

<https://albertadahliaandglad.society.com/>