

As the weather cools down, homeowners are likely giving their lawnmowers a bit of a reprieve from summer activity, but don't put that machine away for the season quite yet. Casey Hentges, host of Oklahoma State University Agriculture's award-winning television show Oklahoma Gardening, offers some helpful tips for homeowners for preparing their lawns for winter. "There are a few things that people should be doing with their lawns and landscapes now to keep them healthy, so they'll look great next spring," Hentges said. Lower the lawnmower deck to about 2.5 inches for that final mowing of warm-season grasses. This gives the lawn a tidy look over the winter. Rake leaves off cool-season lawns to maintain a strong, healthy stand of turf. Young tree trunks with immature bark should be wrapped to prevent southwest injury. If establishing a new tree, visit the local nursery to see what is available now. This will show what colors the tree will be in the fall. Planting new trees now also gives them time to establish a strong root system before a hard winter freeze. Add a splash of color to the landscape with fall flowers such as asters, mums, pansies, ornamental kale or snapdragons. Prepare for spring color by planting spring bulbs now, such as hyacinths, tulips and daffodils. Keep an eye out for discounted perennials at the local garden center. Now is a good time to get those planted in the garden so they'll look their best next spring. Gardeners should harvest the last of their winter vegetables such as sweet potatoes, green tomatoes and winter squash before the first heavy frost. Clear out the remnants of the vegetable garden and plant a cover crop, which is beneficial to the soil. Choose crimson clover, Austrian peas, tillage radishes or even winter wheat. Put leaves and other garden debris that do not have disease into a compost bin. Compost is great for enriching the soil in flowerbeds next spring. "We're in the slower-paced season of gardening, but these tips will help ensure you're off to a great start next spring," Hentges said.