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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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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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Shock Wave petunias are the newest offering. They are larger than other petunias and are the newest of a subgroup of these annuals. Petunias are part of a large family, producing numerous offspring.

Howard said there is also an Easy Wave petunia, which represents a breakthrough in breeding inspired by Japanese horticulturists. "These guys — the petunias — creep through your garden. They put out a huge number of flowers. They creep vigorously and are Oklahoma summer-tolerant," he said.

Also new is a Tidal Wave petunia, which is related to the Shock Wave variety. It flowers in purple, pink, rose and white. Howard says it's a good choice and thrives well in Oklahoma gardens. There is also a new miniature variety named Apricot Punch. The flowers are a golden apricot color with a dark maroon center.

Howard is also fond of celosias. There are two styles, and both are popular this season. One is the cock's comb, with a plume that looks much like a rooster's red flair. The other is a plumose, another feathery flower that also has touches of red.

"There's also a very nice new salvia,"

Howard said. "It's an evolutionary plant and now comes in a very deep purple.

There is also a new series of zinnias called Profusion. This species received an All America Selections Award, which involves entries from a number of trial gardens around the country. Among the favorites was Angelonica, a heat- and sun-loving zinnia, well-suited to the temperament and climate of this area."

Owens, who lives in Stillwater and holds the record as the longest-running host of the popular television program "Oklahoma Gardening," points to a new periwinkle that is now disease-resistant. Periwinkles have suffered from stem disease for years, and this new plant, Madagascar, is heat-tolerant as well. There is also a new variety named Cora being touted as disease-resistant. Its color hues are white with touches of lavender, burgundy and apricot.

Owens is often amused by some of the names floral breeders give to new flowers. There's a Georgia Peach, a Southern Comfort and Alabama Sunrise, all reflective of the South's influence on gardening. He's fond of the hardy hibiscus named Strawberries and Cream, which is 10 inches in diameter in a hot pink color fading to pale pink. Among the daylilies, Owens favors Marguerite and Sweet Caroline.

For perennials, he likes coneflowers and is seeing new colors of purple and orange. The Chicago Botanical Garden has been working on the orange shade the past four or five years. Coconut Lime has more petals and a tinge of lime green.

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