



A pile of pumpkins in every shape, size, and shade is a sure sign that fall has arrived in Oakland County gardens. These autumn staples not only brighten our landscapes but also celebrate the harvest season, cooler weather, and the abundance nature provides. From classic orange to speckled heirlooms, pumpkins remind us of the beauty and diversity of fall.

Photo by: Melanie Fuhrmann

The Oakland Gardener

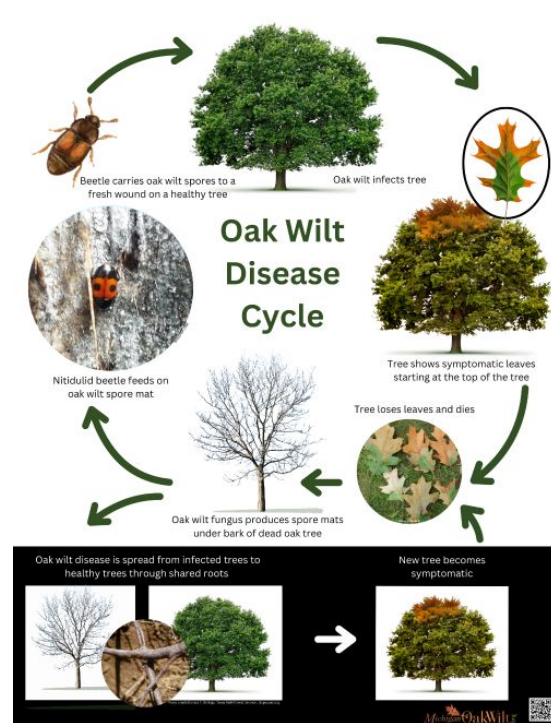
October 2025

Monthly Plant Feature

Understanding Oak Wilt

A popular choice in residential landscaping, the native red oak (*Quercus rubra*) grows 50 to 70 feet and brings homeowners warm red colors in the fall. It is an important tree to the squirrels, deer, and deer. Additionally, many butterflies and the Imperial moth rely on this tree as their host. A grand tree that has so much to offer is also susceptible to an invasive fungus *Bretziella fagacearum*, more widely known as oak wilt.

Oak wilt will kill a healthy red oak within weeks, so it's important that landowners understand how the disease spreads to help reduce the disease pressure in our communities. The oak wilt fungus has multiple paths to spread to other trees. A Nitidulid beetle may eat from a spore mat on an infected tree and carry it to another wounded oak tree. Another route of fungal travel is through the roots of neighboring oak trees. The roots of different trees will graft together underground which creates a highway for the fungus. Unwitting people may help to spread the disease as well. Moving firewood from one locale to another may drag the fungus to a new community where it can take hold and spread.



While oak wilt poses a scary threat, homeowners can help to break the life cycle of this vicious fungus. Avoid pruning trees during the growing season, but most especially from April 15 to July 15. Should a tree require pruning, wait until outside of these dates and preferably when the tree is in its winter dormancy. If a red oak is damaged during the summer and an open wound is visible, a sealant can and should be applied. This is not to protect the tree from the wound but rather to insure a beetle doesn't take advantage of the weak spot. Those of us who enjoy a fire pit also need to source local firewood; this also prevents the spread of other invasive diseases and pests.

Knowing what oak wilt looks like is also beneficial since early detection can save neighboring trees from contracting the fungus. Red oaks that have oak wilt will drop their leaves quickly even in mid-summer. Leaves wilt at the edges, starting at the upper parts of the canopy. The fungus affects a tree's vascular system and in half of the trees a pressure pad between the wood and bark creates a lesion. A fruity or wine odor may be present. Confirming the presence of the fungus is easier than before. Homeowners can send leaf samples to the **MSU Plant and Pest Diagnostics** lab for testing. A positive result can also be reported on Michigan's Invasive Species page to help raise awareness of the disease's presence with others in your neighborhood. Should you find a tree is suffering from oak wilt, contact a certified arborist to help contain the disease.

As we enter fall, take time to enjoy and value our fall colors. It's also a time of reflection on how to take care of the red oak, a large participant in our annual autumnal show.

Extension Master Gardener News

Bittersweet Farm

Good for the world, nourishing for the



body, and uplifting for the soul

Article and photos by: Leah Blinstrub

Six volunteers arrive at Bittersweet Farm on a cool, foggy morning in September. The farm gates creak open and the crew look over rows of brightly colored vegetables with splashes of color from the flower gardens that weave through the property. They work together to harvest the last few weeks of Bittersweet Farm's bounty. With paper and pencil in hand, they weigh the day's harvest. Over 120 pounds of fresh produce will go to neighbors in need at Grace Centers of Hope.

This 18-acre food donation farm was started by Bob and Barb McGowan in 1990. Since its inception, it has been a gift to the local community and gardeners alike. On average, the farm produces 4,000 pounds of food each year. This season has been record-breaking with a yield to date of 5,159 pounds. The season will soon wind down, but there are more winter squash and greens still to come.

Bittersweet provides nutrition for the local community, but it's more than that. The four sides of this garden plot reconnect gardeners and the community with the simple act of growing food. In a world of convenience and busy schedules, planting seeds and tending a garden can feel overwhelming. Bittersweet brings fun and fascination back to growing. Have you ever seen an Illinois squash? This old-time beauty, grown by Abraham Lincoln himself, wows with its unusual shape, white and green striped skin, and average weight of 15–30 pounds. When was the last time you saw a 30-pound squash?

Kathy is the garden's strategic mastermind. She has the dedication of a true scientist and the goal to grow the most interesting, flavorful, and prolific crops. She specializes in plants that keep visitors guessing and shares her knowledge with enthusiasm, inspiring others to dig in and discover the joy of growing edible crops. Thanks to the green thumb of caretakers, tomatoes, beans, eggplant, greens, squash and herbs flourish in rows, waiting to be picked and made into delicious meals.

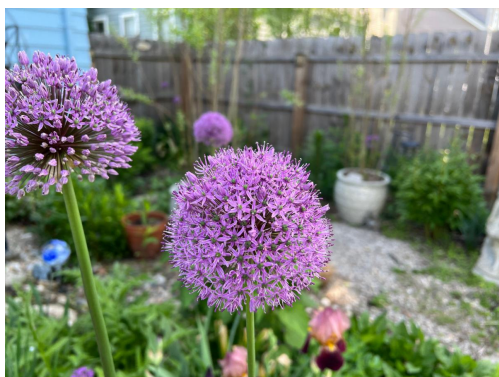
Carole serves as volunteer coordinator, starting each morning with a smile and lively conversation. Anne packages the harvest with care, ensuring it reaches those who need it most. Celeste, Carolyn, and Michael round out the crew, sharing their love of gardening and hospitality. Together this community of volunteers encourages visitors to grow, share, and enjoy food.



At Bittersweet Farm, food and gardening truly come alive. Volunteers are welcome on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM through the first weekend in November—or at the spring opener in late April. Good for the world, nourishing for the body, and uplifting for the soul, Bittersweet is a marvel. Come see it for yourself!

Bittersweet Farm Address:
8551 Allen Road, Clarkston, MI 48348

Gardening Tips and Tricks



Fall Planted Bulbs Bring Spring Blooming Flowers

Article and photos by: Jamiel Dado

There is a great quote from Aubrey Hepburn that I come across from time to time that goes, “To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.” I feel like this sentiment comes up often for gardeners. So much of what we do relies on forward thinking. There is perhaps no more apt timing, however, than autumnal gardening tasks, particularly, the planting of bulbs. When everything is winding down for the season, we start planning for spring.

Why plant bulbs in the fall?

In order to enjoy a bounty of spring blooming plants, now is the time to do the work! It is necessary to get the bulbs into the ground before the ground freezes so that they have a chance to **develop roots**. Timing is important because they need to have a cold to trigger blooming in the spring. Although October is a perfect month to get them in the ground, they can go in later as long as the ground has not yet frozen.

What bulbs should I plant?

There are so many wonderful choices of spring blooming plants that it can definitely feel like an overwhelming choice. Tulips and Daffodils are classic favorites, but plants such as Alliums and Fritillaria offer something unique. It is helpful when deciding on what to plant to check the bloom time, which is usually somewhere on the package the bulbs come in. Try and plant a mixture of things that will bloom from early spring all the way until summer begins. Also, if deer are a problem in your garden, you should probably stay away from tulips! Luckily, there are plenty of **deer resistant** choices that you can make.

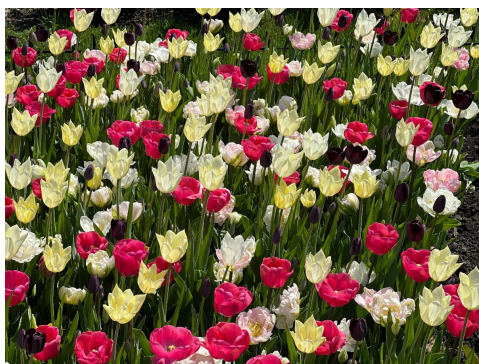


How do I plant bulbs?

When planting bulbs in the fall, as with planting anything at any time, it is paramount to consider location. Pay attention to lighting requirements for each variety so as to ensure beautiful blooms. As always, soil health and **composition** is important. Bulbs require a well-draining soil that retains moisture. Consider **testing your soil** before adding any fertilizers or other soil amendments.

Bulbs should be **planted** at a depth of 2-3 times their diameter. When in doubt, follow the instructions on the packaging. A fun technique, known as “**lasagna**” planting, involves layering different types of bulbs in layers. By placing the largest bulbs on the bottom and working up to the smallest with layers of soil in between, you can maximize space and have a gorgeous display with a staggered bloom

time.



If you are planning a mass planting of anything, it is helpful to go ahead and remove all the soil from the area to the depth needed. Then, you can simply place all the bulbs next to each other in close proximity before replacing the soil. It is important to make sure that the bulbs do not touch each other. This is a bit of work to accomplish but will be quite the showstopper come spring.

Autumn is surely a beautiful time here in Michigan, albeit a little bittersweet. Hopefully, by having some “belief in tomorrow” we can stay hopeful through the winter and look forward to a colorful spring.

Gardening Deep Dive



No Tricks, Opossums Are Just a Treat

*Meet your backyard's fifty-toothed,
tick-eating, hero!*

Article by: Leah Blinstrub

A hiss in the dark. The smell of something dead. Fifty sharp teeth flashing at you in the night. It sounds like a scene from a Halloween movie, but it's just your neighborhood Michigan marsupial caught by surprise. You might be wondering what kind of creature it is — no, it's not a kangaroo; it's the Virginia opossum. **Florida Museum researchers** trace its lineage back 60 million years, noting that remarkably little about the animal has changed since then. It is recognized by its gray-and-white fur, long triangular snout, and prehensile tail. The tail is furless and often described as “rat-like,” but it serves the opossum well, helping it carry objects and climb.

While it may not win a beauty contest, the opossum is surprisingly devoted to personal hygiene. This grooming habit is more than vanity; it makes them powerful allies against ticks. Andrew Kling highlighted the benefits of opossums in a **University of Maryland Extension article**, noting that the longest-running Lyme disease study in the world identifies opossums as “**walking tick vacuums.**” The Lyme disease research is conducted by the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. Researchers observed that as opossums wander, ticks cling to their fur. When the animals settle down to groom, they eat and kill more than 95% of those ticks. Sounds impressive, right?

The next time you see a little gray creature that looks part monster and part house cat, picture a vacuum sucking up ticks and cheer on this hardworking Michigan marsupial. If you have space, consider offering an opossum shelter for

the winter. With wild opossums living only 2–3 years, cold weather is especially tough on them. A safe spot in your yard could give this unsung hero a better chance while rewarding your neighborhood with a surprisingly hygienic and helpful companion.

For more information about opossums, the ways they help the ecosystem, and how you can help them, check out the following articles from **MSU Extension**, **Rhode Island Fish and Wildlife**, and the **NC Cooperative Extension**.

Gardening for Health and Wellness

Embracing Locally-Sourced Seasonal Food

Article by: Annie Fairfax

Photos by: Melanie Fuhrmann



Autumn is a time of change. The leaves around us begin to darken into rich reds and oranges, to deep yellows and warm golds. Birds migrate south ahead of colder weather. Humans, too, tend to slow down as the weather begins to cool. Even though the outdoor world changes swiftly in October and beyond, our gardens still require our attention and affection. In turn, they provide us with everything (or nearly everything) we need to thrive. Here are a few ways eating seasonally benefits us and our communities.

Unsure what's in season? Check out MSU's seasonality guide[here](#).

Attunement with Nature

Eating seasonally helps us attune our bodies to natural cycles of growth and renewal. Pay attention to what's in season here in Michigan as the weather cools. Foods like broccoli, cabbage, celery, apples, pumpkins, squash, turnips, and many herbs are widely available and ready to harvest for savvy gardeners who have already planted these nutritious beauties.

Better Flavor

Before out-of-season foods can be shipped long distances, they are typically harvested before they reach their peak ripeness. Sometimes they're frozen for up to a year before they reach us. Eating freshly harvested, locally-grown products avoids these flavor pitfalls and ensures each bite is bursting with flavor. This is part of the reason why food straight from the garden tastes better!

Cost Savings

Eating produce grown locally while it's in season is cheaper for everyone involved, from growers and gardeners to farmers and supermarkets. Everyone wins when eating locally-grown products!

Reduced Environmental Impact

Which has a lower carbon footprint? Almonds grown in California and shipped to Michigan, *or* corn, beans, and squash grown in your backyard? By celebrating and eating what grows locally when it's in season, we help the planet by reducing transportation-associated environmental tolls.



Economic Benefits

We gardeners cannot always grow everything we need for our families ahead of winter, no matter how much we plan and can. So, turning to CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture), local farmers' markets, and responsible foraging can help bridge the gap. By supporting other local growers, funds stay in our communities, bolstering the local economy.

Furthermore, growing your own squash, pumpkins, and autumnal greens means you won't need to buy any should you wish to decorate your porch, deck, or balcony with festive colors, shapes, and textures.

Community Enrichment

Gardening, swapping produce, and conversing with other local growers can be an excellent way to meet like-minded gardening or farming enthusiasts. You can do this by visiting farmers' markets, participating in produce swaps, or creating a local seed exchange with like-minded individuals.

Inspiration for Next Year

Missed out on planting plants and food to harvest in autumn? Keep a journal of varieties you'd like to grow next year. Use this as inspiration when planning next year's garden. Bonus points if you save seeds from this year's bounty to plant next year!

Want to learn more about seed saving? Read this [article](#) and this [seed saving guide](#) from MSU to learn more.



Smart Gardening is MSU Extension's campaign using earth-friendly messages to help gardeners make smart choices in their own backyards. The goal is to equip gardeners with a "tool kit" of research-based knowledge to use immediately at home. Whether choosing plants, using garden chemicals, fertilizer or applying water, gardeners need to understand the long-term impacts on their communities. For more Smart Gardening information click [here](#).



Ask Extension

Call the MSU Extension Lawn and Garden Hotline at 1-888-678-3464 (Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9am to

Upcoming Events

MSU Tollgate Farm and Education Center

PUMPKINFEST 2025



**Live Music | Pumpkin Patch | Games
and so much more!**

SATURDAY OCT 04 SUNDAY OCT 05
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

**Visit our
Website**

The Novi Home Show

October 10, 2025, 12 p.m. - 7 p.m.
October 11, 2025, 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
October 12, 2025, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Suburban Collection Showplace
46100 Grand River Avenue Novi, MI 48374

THE NOVI HOME SHOW

Home Improvement & Services
Decorating • Landscaping

novihomeshow.com

Discover new home improvement products and services for every type of project imaginable! Speak to, and set up appointments with experienced, established area businesses available for consulting or hire!

Learn Fall gardening tips and tricks from experts and MSU Extension educators! Ask Extension Master Gardeners your gardening questions! Kids can take home a fun fall gardening craft on Saturday & Sunday.

A photograph of three women in a garden setting. They are all smiling and looking at a tablet held by the woman in the center. The woman on the left has long braids and is wearing a yellow shirt. The woman in the center is wearing a plaid shirt and dark overalls. The woman on the right is wearing a plaid shirt and light-colored overalls. They are all wearing green gardening gloves. The background shows various plants and a greenhouse structure.

GARDENING THROUGH THE SEASONS

**AUBURN HILLS CAMPUS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2025
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM**



OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE*
Community Education

This gardening class is designed for beginning gardeners as well as experienced green thumbs. Let's be real - gardening can feel overwhelming. When and how do we do specific gardening tasks? What about pollinators, seeds, weeds, Winter Sowing, volunteer plants, pruning, invasive plants? Let's walk thru the garden during all seasons: explore, learn, discover! This course is ideal for anyone interested in managing their garden with ease.

Register



WEEKENDS IN OCTOBER 2025

WAGON RIDES - ANIMALS - CORN MAZE

LIVE MUSIC FRIDAYS - FARM FOOD

FACE PAINTING SATURDAYS - BOUNCE PAD

MOBILE RECREATION UNITS PROVIDED BY OAKLAND COUNTY PARKS
AND MUCH MORE!

October 3 - 25, 2025

- Fridays 5p - 10p
- Saturdays 10a - 4p



[Learn More!](#)



Foundations of GARDENING



Scholarship
application open
October 14-
November 11,
2025



Take the Foundations of Gardening course to learn the science behind a great garden, or to apply to become an MSU Extension Master Gardener

Winter class: February 12- April 16, 2026
Registration opens December 2, 2025



<https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/foundations-of-gardening>

We Need Your Voice!

On behalf of King Media in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Together, we're working on an important initiative that could directly protect Michigan's environment and industries from the growing threat of invasive species.



To succeed, **we need your voice—and the voices of your networks.** Below we have created two short surveys:

- **One for Michigan residents**
- **One for producers of natural materials** (gravel, mulch, firewood, soil, compost, etc.)

Your help in sharing these surveys will ensure we gather the diverse perspectives needed to guide a potential statewide Invasive Species Program. A few clicks to forward an email, post on social media, or pass it along could make a lasting impact on Michigan's natural resources and

communities.

If you have questions or need additional details please email andrea.carfagno@kingmedianow.com.

Thank you in advance for lending your support to this effort—your outreach will truly help shape Michigan's environmental future.

News You Can Use



Fall color comes early

Bert Cregg, Michigan State University Extension, Departments of Forestry and Horticulture - September 23, 2025

Residents of Michigan's Lower Peninsula have likely noticed our fall foliage season is off to an early start. The typical development of fall color in Michigan begins in the Upper Peninsula in mid- to late-September and ends in late-October in southeast Michigan, progressing in roughly weekly increments from the Upper Peninsula southward.

[Read More](#)



MSU Organic Farmer Training expands to Grand Rapids, adding to program's learning community in Detroit and East Lansing

Katie Brandt, Michigan State University Extension - September 03, 2025

Sign up now for Michigan State University's (MSU) 2026 [Organic Farmer Training Program \(OFTP\)](#) in Detroit, East Lansing or Grand Rapids, Michigan, to make your farm dreams a reality! There is no better way to learn how to farm than to dig in and learn on the farm.

[Read More](#)



Featured Five 2025: Favorites from Pell Greenhouses

Heidi Lindberg and Caitlin Splawski, Michigan State University Extension - August 29, 2025

Every year, Michigan State University and Michigan's leading young plant producers host a free open house at their trial sites and display gardens for growers, landscapers and retail operators to learn about a wide range of ornamental crops.

[Read More](#)



Enrollment now open: Popular MSU Extension course Introduction to Lakes Online offered January 2026

Paige Filice, Michigan State University Extension - September 03, 2025

As summer winds down, now is a great time for those who enjoy our lakes to learn more about them and how to keep them healthy. One popular learning opportunity is the [Introduction to Lakes Online course](#)

[Read More](#)

[MSU Tollgate](#)

[Bowers Farm](#)

[Gardening in Michigan](#)

[MSU Extension](#)

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