

October Garden Activities from Your Master Gardener Extension Volunteers

Trees and Shrubs - Plant trees and shrubs now. Their roots will have time to become well established before the demands of spring growth. Remove any twine or wire that is wrapped around the trunk when you plant.

Lightly fertilize evergreen azaleas and rhododendron to prevent yellowing during winter.

Refurbish mulch around shrubs and trees but do not place mulch too close to the plant's trunk. Mulch helps control weeds, provides insulation for the roots during cold weather, and helps keep the soil moist.

Do not heavily prune shrubs or trees now, as this will force new growth that will be susceptible to cold weather injury.

Keep evergreen shrubs and small trees watered to help prevent damage from low temperatures.

Fruit Trees - Pick up fallen apples, peaches, pears and plums from under your trees and destroy them to avoid diseases next spring.

Vegetables - Clean up old plant debris from this year's vegetable garden because insects and diseases can survive winter weather in this material. Before storing your tomato cages, remove old tomato vines from them.

Add spent plants from your vegetable and flower gardens and leaves to your compost pile. Do not put diseased plant material in your compost pile or you may spread disease to other plants when you use your compost. If you do not have a compost pile, start one.

Spread shredded leaves and manure over your vegetable garden soil and turn it under to improve soil fertility, structure, and water-holding capacity.

Harvest your pumpkins as the vines begin to dry.

Protect strawberries with a light layer of pine straw mulch.

Dig sweet potatoes as the vines die back. Let them 'cure' in a dry, warm spot before storing.

If you have not already planted garlic, plant now for harvest next summer. Break garlic bulbs into individual cloves for planting, 3 inches deep and 4-6 inches apart.

Harvest mature green tomatoes before the first frost.
Before the first frost, cut and preserve herbs.

Water your soil before harvesting your carrots so they will be easier to pull. Once harvested, trim the tops so the leaves will not draw moisture out of the carrots, making them limp.

Flowerbeds - Fall is a very good time to plant perennials like coneflower and black-eyed Susan and divide existing perennials.

Divide perennials like daylilies, phlox, and iris.

Collect seeds from perennials and annuals. Clean them and store them in a cool dry place. Plant them next spring.

As the weather turns cool, plant spring flowering bulbs like tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, and crocus. A general rule is to set bulbs three times as deep as the dimension of the bulb.

Fertilize freshly planted pansies with a water-soluble fertilizer. Switch to a nitrate nitrogen fertilizer as the weather gets cooler.

Cut chrysanthemums and asters back to about five inches tall after they have bloomed so they will sprout strongly in spring.

Top-dress your perennial beds with one or two inches of compost, keeping it away from the crown of your plants.

Fertilize established bulb beds with one-half cup per ten square feet of bulb fertilizer, always following package directions.

Plant peonies now. Buds should be no more than two inches below the soil surface.

Continue planting pansies and other cool season annuals like snapdragons and ornamental kale.

After the foliage dies back, dig caladium bulbs and store them loosely in dry peat moss or vermiculite for the winter.

If you have not already done so, dig dahlia tubers and elephant's-ear for winter storage. Dry them under shelter for about a week then store them loosely in dry peat moss.

Lawns - Rake fallen leaves from your lawn to keep them from matting down and killing your grass. Add them to your compost pile.

Replace areas of the lawn that are thin because of too much shade with a groundcover like liriopse or ajuga.

Soil Test - If your soil test indicates that your soil needs lime, now is the time to add it to your soil in the recommended amounts.

Houseplants - As night temperatures approach the mid-50s, bring in houseplants that have spent the warm weather on your deck or patio. Check for insect infestation.

Divide overgrown Boston ferns and re-pot.

Miscellaneous - Carve a pumpkin.

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