

Garden Club
Horticultural Hints
October 2018

Autumn comes to the garden



How's your fall color? New England is beloved for its fall color. Most people think the best color shows up on trees. But, if you have a smaller garden or a property surrounded by pine trees, you might find your best color comes from native shrubs. Itea (sweetspire), fothergilla, clethra (summersweet), vaccinium (blueberries), and physocarpus (ninebark) all offer brilliant and long-lasting autumn color.

Itea (common name: Virginia sweetspire) is a compact shrub that turns beautiful shades of rust, yellow and red in the autumn. It's a great addition to any garden.

Do NOT rake leaves from under shrubs! Those leaves act as a mulch protecting the bush's root over the winter. Moreover, a number of beneficial insects winter over in those leaves. Once you rake them, cart them away or chip them, you've removed insect friends from your garden.

Plant seeds that need winter chilling like bachelor buttons and milkweed now. Would you like more butterflies? Plant swamp milkweed now. That dismal name disguises a plant with a lovely pink flower with a wonderful scent. And, later in the season, swamp plant will be visited by many butterflies, including our endangered Monarchs for which the milkweed is required to produce the next generation.



Rose (or swamp) milkweed pods (right) will produce plants next year (top)



Keep mowing your lawn, but set the mower to two inches for as long as your grass keeps growing. Also, mow leaves into the lawn. Mowing not only saves you the task of raking; by chopping leaves into small pieces, they will break down over the winter to put vital nutrients back into the soil.



Divide any perennials with a dead center. In some plants such as irises and grasses, the centers die as the plant grows. Cut the perennial into four or more pieces, discard the old center and replant. Next year, you will have more plants to enjoy or share..

Bring houseplants in carefully. Your houseplant that summered outside (or on a porch) are used to much more sunlight than they will get in the house. A first stop on a sheltered porch will give them an opportunity to begin adjusting. While they are still outside, spray them with an insecticidal soap or Neem oil to kill any pests they may have picked up over the summer.



Clean up your flower beds and vegetable garden. By getting rid of insect pests, plant diseases and weeds that have made their way into your garden this month, you'll start next spring with far fewer problems. Old vines (tomato, squash and cucumber); old plants (beans and cauliflower); and corn stalks all should be bagged up and taken to your town's transfer station because many insects and diseases can over-

Avoid using 'weed and feed' now more than ever. The fertilizer (the 'feed') won't be used by grass, which is no longer growing rapidly, and the herbicide (the 'weed') is pointless because weed seeds are no longer germinating.

Instead of improving your lawn, these chemicals will find their way to local waters, kill beneficial microbes in the soil and feed overwintering weeds



Cool weather is a great time to turn the compost bin. Once it's turned, put new additions on the bottom and the older, partially composted material on top. What goes to the compost bin? Any clean plant material, including lettuce that has turned bitter, carrots that have gotten woody, annual flowers that are at the end of their lives.

