

Garden Club Horticultural Hints

October 2021

Time for the garden clean-up!



Containers designed for summer need to be taken apart, cleaned and stored for the winter. The exceptions are containers that can withstand freezing weather – usually metal, wood and certain plastic and foam containers. Once cleaned, winter-hardy containers can be replanted for fall and winter color with small evergreens, ornamental kale, colorful grasses and perennials such as Heuchera. Remember to water planted containers into the winter because the soil in the pot will dry out on sunny days.

Plants that summered outside may be root-bound so, cut away excess roots as you move them to a new container.



Last call for houseplants. It has been cold outside and your houseplants are not happy. Clean them up, repot (if they have outgrown their old container over the summer) and check for any uninvited occupants. It is also a good time to prune them back into shape if they have been growing too vigorously, or to divide them to share with friends. They may be unhappy as they adjust to the lower light and dryer conditions of your home. While they need water, be careful not to overwater them. Hold off fertilizing them for now.



In the vegetable garden. Some vegetables will survive light to moderate frosts. Spinach can tolerate a light frost. Members of the cabbage family such as kale and Brussels sprouts taste sweeter after expose to frost. Root crops including parsnips, salsify and even carrots and turnips can be left in the ground for later harvests, especially if protected by a light covering of straw or chopped leaves.



Cleanup time. Vegetables and flower beds need a thorough clean-up this month. Remove all old foliage. Bag any diseased or insect-infested material and send it to the dump. Taking these actions now allows your plants to get a fresh start next spring, without the risk of infection from this year's problems. 'Clean' foliage should go into your compost bin or to your town's compost center.

A raised-bed planter can provide several degrees of additional protection against autumn frosts, especially if the gardener adds a frame for nighttime protection with a row cover or even an old sheet.



A group of bulbs provides a sweep of spring color, rather than a 'row of soldiers'

Spring bulbs now! If you haven't purchased your bulbs yet, grab your phone (or computer) and get your order in before they run out of choices. Plant tulips now and daffodils at the end of this month when the soil is cooler. If you have a problem with deer or rabbits eating your bulbs, keep in mind that hyacinths, like daffodils, have an irritating sap that convinces most browsers that one bite is more than enough. Top bulbs with a layer of lime --it's good for the bulbs and irritating those who are looking for something to eat!

Small bulbs – chinodoxia, crocus, grape hyacinths and others – should be planted in clusters along sidewalks or driveways where they can be appreciated up close. Some of the small bulbs such as galanthus (snowdrops) and scilla (squill) will naturalize in grassy areas providing color in early spring. Larger bulbs make a wonderful start to many beds where they bloom before the perennial flowers come up and deciduous shrubs leaf out. Their yellowing foliage will be hidden later under the new foliage of the perennials.

Never rake a new lawn! If you planted a new lawn this fall or over-seeded an existing one, the roots are still very small and not very strong. Raking the lawn will pull up the grass with the leaves. But if leaves are left in place, they could smother the new grass. So just mow it. The chopped-up leaves will decompose over the winter adding nutrients to the soil to feed your grass. Old lawns also benefit from mowing rather than raking.

If you absolutely *must* remove the leaves, mow them into a grass catcher. The chopped leaves make an excellent winter covering for garden beds and especially around newly planted trees and shrubs.



If you have a cold frame, lettuce, spinach, beets, kale and other cold-tolerant vegetables can be grown into the winter. Cold frames can consist of as little as a well secured tent of clear plastic, or as fancy as ones with heat sensors that automatically raise the lid when the sun or warm days make it too hot inside. It makes a special meal when some of your Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner can be picked fresh that morning.

Written and created by Betty Sanders. For more horticultural suggestions for October and throughout the year, please visit www.BettyOnGardening.com