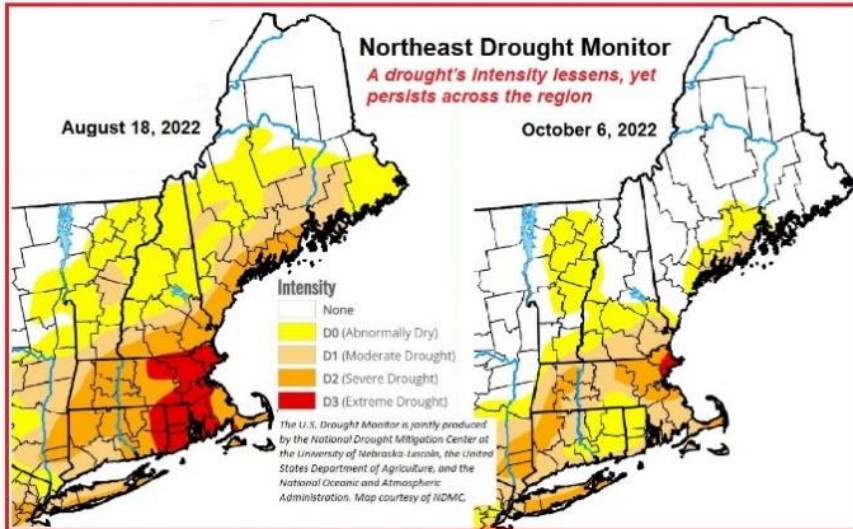


Garden Club Horticultural Hints

October 2022

Bring on the cool weather!



New England's drought is less severe, but persists. Near-normal rainfall in September and early October has tempered the severity of 2022's drought, but groundwater remains low across most of the region, leaving large areas still in 'moderate' or 'severe' drought. What does a gardener do? If your town allows hand or hose watering, focus on hydrating your more recent additions. For trees, focus on those planted in the past five years; for shrubs, two years; and for perennials this year. All lack a deep, well-established root system. Keep watering until the ground freezes. You'll have done everything you can for your garden.



Carefully check trees and shrubs for branches that have been broken by the wind or falling debris. Prune broken limbs out now; don't leave them until spring. The clean cut you make now will heal faster and you will protect the plant from further damage by winter storms. Pick up any downed branches and chip them to use as mulch and protect your existing plants this winter.

Repot houseplants if you didn't do so when you moved them indoors earlier. Use a pot saucer to catch any overflow and place the plant in its new home. When re-potting, start with a coffee filter (or similar) over the pot's drain hole to contain the soil, then add a layer of soil. Hold the plant at the level you want it to sit and add soil around it to stand it upright (with large plants you may need an assistant). Firm the soil but do not pack it down. Water thoroughly until it runs out the bottom. Set the container aside and add more water until you are certain the entire pot is wet. Use a pot saucer to catch any overflow and place the plant in its new home.



While it may seem counter-intuitive, those roots in this pot-bound plant are bad for its long-term health. The bottom roots should be cut off and the balance spread out to allow them to grow and spread out into their new home. That new pot should be at least an inch wider and deeper than its predecessor. And always use fresh potting mix



Houseplants need rest. Many houseplants are not very happy now. After the move inside, light levels dropped – dramatically in many cases. As our furnaces came on, the humidity levels followed suit. Don't compound their problems by watering too heavily. The plants are going into a resting phase during the dark winter months and need less water. Check with your finger before watering to prevent saturating them. Unless you are growing your plant under lights, don't try to promote growth by feeding them now.



The end of container season. Our summer containers are gone, our fall containers won't be looking so good after a hard frost. Empty them out and clean them for next year. Reusing old potting mix may seem the frugal thing to do, but it not built to last for years and may harbor diseases or insect eggs. Toss it and clean the container by brushing out the remaining soil and then washing it in a 10% bleach solution (a cup of bleach to a half gallon of water). Allow it to dry and then store it in a garden shed, garage or basement and you are ready to plant it again in the spring.



Leaf mulch is a terrific winter blanket for the plants in your garden. While it is available commercially, you can make your own by repeatedly mowing your fallen leaves. If you own a string trimmer, an even better way to make leaf mulch is to stuff leaves into a large trash can and run the trimmer up and down a few times

Button up your overcoat. After you have cleaned up your gardens, spread an inch of compost or a layer of fresh organic mulch (like chopped up leaves) over them. The compost will work its way into the soil, revitalizing it for the spring growing season by adding nutrients and organic matter to the soil. Most plants that die in the winter do so not from the cold but from having their roots exposed as the soil freezes and thaws. One to two inches of compost or mulch can help keep them covered until the soil freezes and then keep those plants safely frozen until spring arrives.

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