

Garden Club Horticultural Hints

September 2021

Anyone got an idea where we can put all this rain?



Time to bring them from summer quarters

Vacation is over for your houseplants. While it is still very warm outside, houseplants that have spent the past few months under the summer sun or on a porch need to begin the transition back indoors. Those that were fully outdoors should be brought onto a porch or deck where they will receive less daylight – the first step to help them acclimate to the lower light level in your home. Plants that have been in contact with the ground should be re-potted to ensure worms, ants or pests are not tagging along. Check for any obvious signs of insects on the leaves, stems and top of the soil. Cleaning the plant using an insecticidal soap can help to keep aphids, mites and others from causing a big problem indoors. Once you make the move indoors, the drier air and lower light levels mean the plant cannot support all the foliage it did outdoors, so don't despair if your plants drop a few leaves.

Snails and slugs continue to feed on hostas and other susceptible plants. Kill them now with an iron-phosphate-based product (such as Sluggo) which, unlike older remedies, is harmless to pets, other wildlife and the environment. When cleaning your garden, remove and destroy all potentially infected plant debris because slugs leave behind eggs that will hatch next spring. If a plant had a particularly bad infestation, assume there are slug eggs in the soil or mulch and remove and bag the top layer.



Insects. It would seem with the end of the growing season approaching, insects would be less of a problem, but that is not always the case. Like us, they're preparing for winter. Wasps, including the yellow jackets that are often misidentified as bees, are particularly aggressive this time of the year. Remember, there are hives in the ground as well as in trees and shrubs

In the vegetable garden. Your basil (and most other herbs) are likely sending up flower stalks. Pinch off the stalk at their base. Once your basil flowers, and those flowers are pollinated, the plant thinks its work is done and puts all its energy into producing seed rather than the leaves you want for your kitchen.



Raking – Don’t! Research by Cornell Extension Service shows that raking your lawn is totally unnecessary. Just use a mulching mower (almost any gas or electric-powered mower will do) to chop the leaves into small pieces which will compost directly into the soil over the winter. Cornell’s research shows up to sixteen (more than a foot) inches of dried leaves can be added to the soil every year. This includes tough oak leaves, which break down very slowly unless they have been chopped up, and pine needles, which are less acidic than oak leaves. If your leaves are deep, you may have to mow twice to chop them all sufficiently small, but it’s still a lot less work than raking and much better for the environment than throwing leaves in the trash. By mulching, all the nutrients in the leaves go back into the soil where they’ll be available for the tree roots to take them up for future years.



Music to everyone who hate raking



Put away your pruners for now. While it is tempting, this is not the time to be pruning any woody plants around your garden. Spring blooming trees and shrubs have set their flowers for next spring, so pruning would remove those buds. As to those still blooming (or recently finished), pruning them now will encourage new growth that will likely be too tender to make it through the winter. Pruners and saws should not be used on woody plants until the cold weather is thoroughly established in November.

Trimming shrubs and other woody plants like this Lindera now will encourage new growth – which won’t harden off before freezing temperatures set in.

Clean-up time. Time to start cleaning your gardens. As annuals and most vegetables reach the end of their productive life, cut them down and add the healthy material to the compost bin. Any diseased (for example, downy mildew) or insect-infested material should be bagged and placed in the trash. All garden weeds should be pulled now and bagged (and definitely not composted), chopped or otherwise made incapable of growing. Left in place, the weeds will produce thousands of seeds in your lawn and garden, making your job much more difficult next year.



Cut down perennials as their season ends to stay ahead of the garden clean-up process



And beware of ticks, they continue to be active even as the temperatures drop. The list of dangerous tick-borne diseases grows each year. Moreover, ticks do not die with the first frost: they will survive the winter and hop onto the unwary any day the temperature is above freezing.

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