

Gardening Things to Think About in the Fall

By Earl Hockin, Master Gardener

Autumn, a great time to be outdoors in the garden, is definitely here. It is time to enjoy the cooler weather and to gaze upon fall blooming plants such as Appalachian Sunflowers (*Helianthus atrorubens*), Goldenrod (*Solidago*), New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*), Japanese Anemone (*Anemone hepensis*), and Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*).

When bringing in house plants, be sure to inspect them. Look on both sides of leaves, the stems, and leaf/stem junction for insects such as aphids and mealybugs. An insecticidal soap will eradicate both. You might want to put a granular insecticide on the soil to kill any insects that might be there.

Since you won't be using many of your gardening tools, this is the time to clean them before storing them for winter. Use a coarse metal brush, like one used for cleaning grills, or steel wool for smaller tools to scrape dirt off the metal parts of your tools. Follow up with a dry rag and, if necessary, a damp rag. Rub any rust away with a piece of sandpaper. Once your tools are clean, treat them with vegetable oil, WD-40, silicone spray, or other rust inhibitor. Remove any splinters from your wooden handles with sandpaper, and then wipe the handle down with linseed oil. This can be done to shovels, spades, hoes, rakes, hand shovels, and garden knives.

Run your lawn mower until its fuel runs out; leaving fuel to sit over the winter can degrade plastic and rubber parts and rust metal ones. Remove the blades and sharpen and oil them. Scrape or rinse away all built up grass and dirt. Disconnect the battery and spark plugs to keep it from accidentally starting over the winter. Do the same for other gasoline powered tools like leaf blowers and weed whackers. Tools like pruners and shears can be cleaned by unscrewing the nut that holds them together then washing all parts separately in soapy water. To sanitize tools, soak the parts in 70% alcohol or 1 part bleach to 9 parts water. If using bleach, rinse thoroughly to prevent rust. Then scrub with steel wool to remove any rust, rinse and dry. This is also the time to sharpen them if needed, then rub with rust inhibitor and reassemble.

Review what your garden was like this year. What things did well and what was not very successful? What do you want to remove, move, or add? As mentioned last week, this is the time to plant spring blooming bulbs such as daffodils, hyacinth, iris, crocus, fritillaria, etc. It is also the time to plant garlic and onion bulbs once the soil temperature drops below 50 F. There are still some businesses available online who are selling some garlic bulbs for planting, but they may be sold out soon.

In planning next year's flower garden, think like a pollinator with these tips from the US Forest Service:

- "Go Native. Pollinators are "best" adapted to local, native plants, which often need less water than ornamentals
- Bee Bountiful. Plant big patches of each plant species (better foraging efficiency.)
- Bee Sunny. Provide areas with sunny, bare soil that's dry and well-drained, preferably with south-facing slopes.
- Bee Showy. Flowers should bloom in your garden throughout the growing season. Plant willow, currant, and Oregon grape for spring and aster, rabbit brush and goldenrod for fall flowers.
- Bee Patient. It takes time for native plants to grow and for pollinators to find your garden, especially if you live far from wild lands."

More info including some plant suggestions:

"Attracting Pollinators to Your Garden Using Native Plants",

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/pollinators/documents/AttractingPollinatorsV5.pdf>

Also check out the 2022 gardening calendar from the University of Tennessee at <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W436.pdf>

Resources

“Maintaining Lawn and Garden Tools”, <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/maintaining-lawn-and-garden-tools/>

“How to Winterize Your Lawn Mower in 9 Easy Steps”, *Popular Mechanics*, Nov. 3, 2021.
<https://www.popularmechanics.com/home/lawn-garden/how-to/a24355/how-to-winterize-your-lawn-mower/>

“Take notes now for a healthier garden next year,” <https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-news/take-notes-now-healthier-garden-next-year>

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.