

Fall Gardening (published 2024-10-05)
By Teresa Gaffner, Master Gardener

October is an important month for pre-spring planting of bulbs and trees, fall garden bed cleanup and for brushing up on your pruning skills.

Right now is a good time to plan ahead and plant for a spring garden. Bulbs are available in many big box stores and at your local nursery and this is the perfect time to plant daffodils, alliums, hyacinth, crocuses and tulips. You can also plant deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs in the fall as they are in a dormant stage and under less stress. Give them a good initial watering after planting and check back in with them periodically during the autumn and winter months and water if needed. Lightly fertilize your newly planted trees and shrubs if a soil test indicates a deficiency as it will give the nutrients time to be absorbed by the roots and made available for growth in the spring. Do not use a nitrogen dominant fertilizer at this time as it could cause new growth that would die back in the winter and compromise the plant's integrity. Plant flowering trees and shrubs now to take advantage of winter rains and give them time to establish strong root systems. Azalea, viburnums, roses and dogwood fall into this category. Follow the same good practices as listed for the deciduous and evergreen plantings.

Setting out perennials in the fall will guarantee well established flowering plants in the spring and summer. Plant them alongside your bulbs for a colorful showpiece next year. Some great perennials for the Tri-Cities area are coreopsis, dianthus, salvia, phlox and various sedums. Plant before the first frost, don't fertilize and be sure to apply mulch around the plant to help them overwinter. Give them a good initial watering when planting and monitor them to ensure they have enough moisture to encourage root growth. There are a few annuals you can plant now. Seeds or transplants of pansies and violas should be set out before the first frost so they can establish themselves before winter arrives. Plant garlic and shallots bulbs now for a summer harvest. Cover them with a straw mulch for protection from freezing weather.

Do a thorough cleaning and weeding of your garden beds before the cold weather sets in. Cut back and mulch any disease-free tender perennials and plants.

October is the month to begin bringing in your outdoor potted plants. Check the soil and under the leaves for any unwanted pests. Bring in any lawn ornaments that are not frost proof. Monitor the weather so you can anticipate our areas first frost.

Pruning during the fall months is about removing the 4 D's we have mentioned in previous articles. Diseased, decaying, damaged and dead plant material can be removed at anytime although it's best to pick a clear, dry day to do it. However, you do not want to prune your trees and bushes in the fall because this will cause new growth to appear that will die back in the winter and cause your plant to be vulnerable to disease and infestation. Also, next year's flower buds are already established inside the branches of your flowering shrubs and trees. If you trim these off now you can significantly lower the number of next springs blossoms. This is a link to a great publication from the University of Tennessee on the basics of pruning that can help you get started.

<https://uthort.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/228/2024/02/PB1619-BMP-Pruning-Landscape-Trees-Shrubs-and-Ground-Covers.pdf>

There is still time to consider using cover crops to improve your soil's condition. Cover crops are not harvested but allowed to die back into the ground so that they add nutrients like nitrogen into your soil. Select the cover crop based on your goals for soil enhancement. Here is a link for some more information.

<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W346-G.pdf>

There is also a video available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJpPwDsFxFxWY>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT's YouTube site for helpful videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IkIH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County's YouTube site:

<https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

October Event

Steel Creek Park Wildlife Weekend – Arts in the Natural World

October 11 & 12

Guided hikes, bird walk, interactive kiosks, mini sessions

For details go to: <https://www.bristoltn.gov/1443/Wildlife-Weekend>

How do I ask a question?

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.