

October Gardening Tasks

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We've had a brief taste of winter, which meant lots of coat switching and discovering gloves in coat pockets, hat hair concerns, and turning on your car's heater. Plants have also responded to the cold snap with even a few losing many of their leaves, but at this time most are still holding onto their green leaves.

This is the perfect time to plant trees and shrubs. It's safe to plant trees and shrubs until the ground freezes so now there's plenty of time to plant. Make sure the trees and shrubs get enough water but as the first few light freezes appear in forecasts start backing off with the watering so the plants don't have too much moisture in their leaves and/or branches and twigs. If too much moisture is present in these tender growing areas, freezing temperatures will turn water into ice, which expands and destroys cell tissues causing freeze damage. Avoid all fertilizing until next year.

Unless we're talking about damaged or dead limbs, it's too early to do trimming on roses, shrubs, or evergreens. Trimming encourages the plants to produce new growth while the temperatures are still warmish and the day lengths are long enough. New growth means tender plant tissue and lots of water and, again, if it suddenly freezes the new growth is quickly destroyed.

It's too late and too cool for grass seeds to germinate but if the seeds don't become someone's dinner ungerminated seeds will overwinter on the ground and start their growth process in the spring. Because of the animals and insects looking for such tasty morsels, more than a few folks wait until just before a snow fall to scatter grass seeds on their lawns. The snow not only protects the seeds from being eaten but also pushes the seeds into the ground just enough to allow for better germination come spring.

If perennial weeds in your lawn and garden still have green leaves, now is the perfect time to spray them with broad leaf or indiscriminate herbicides. Remember indiscriminate herbicides will kill whatever it comes in contact with when it's wet so apply cautiously and always follow label instructions. At this time of the year spraying annual weeds is a waste of time and money as well as putting herbicides into the environment that have very little, if any, negative effects on the annuals which will soon be dead anyhow.

Finally, even though we've been fortunate this year having conditions where regular watering wasn't the usual concern, all plants need adequate moisture to make it through winter. This is especially true for newly planted trees, shrubs, and perennials. Continue to check soil moisture levels by sticking your finger into the ground two knuckles deep. If it's dry the plant probably needs water. If it's moist there's enough moisture in the ground for most plants. If throughout the winter there's a warm period where the daytime temperatures will go above 40 degrees for several days in a row, consider watering especially for plants that have been in the ground less than a year. Water in the morning to allow the water to be absorbed throughout the day.



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