



Riverview Garden Club Helpful Hints



October 2019

The cooler weather should be invigorating and want you to do some clean up, planting of bulbs, and critter protection. Use your time wisely before the average first frost hits, which for us in zone 6b is October 11-20.

Keep your compost pile active by adding layers of green material (grass clippings and frost killed annuals or perennials) and brown, dried material (fallen leaves, shredded twigs, and dried grass) with small amounts of soil, fertilizer, and moisture. Turn regularly. Keep diseased or insect infested material out of the pile. Excess fallen leaves can be shredded and kept aside to use later next month as mulch for perennial and garden beds once the ground has frozen hard.

Apply fertilizer this month to trees or shrubs that have not received any fertilizer this year and/or demonstrated need—stunted growth, failure to fully flower or leaf out, undersized fruit, off color foliage, or recovery from disease or insect attack. Continue to water newly planted trees and shrubs, especially evergreens up until ground freezes.

If rabbits, rodents, or deer have been a problem in past winters, take precautions with woody plants now. To keep deer from rubbing antlers on tree trunks, spread garden netting or snow fencing around abused trees. Creation of physical barriers is more effective than sprays. Protect tree trunks from gnawing rabbits by setting up 12-16 inches of hardware cloth tacked into the soil three inches away from the trunk.

After a killing frost, remove annual plant material from you garden and add it to your compost heap. Any soilless mix from window boxes or containers can be discarded or kept aside for one more year. If used for a second year, mix equal parts old mix with fresh soilless mix. Clean and sterilize containers before storing over winter.

Do not mulch your perennial garden until the ground has frozen hard later in November.

Begin to plant spring-blooming bulbs. Mulch the area after planting. If rodents, deer, or rabbits have been a problem in the past, consider planting varieties of the following pest resistant bulbs—ornamental onion, grape hyacinth, fritillary, narcissus, windflower, or winter aconite.

Cut back above ground foliage and stems of cannas and dahlias to 4-5 inches. Gently lift up tubers using a pitchfork. Shake off excess soil and dry tubers in a warm, dry place. Do not separate the mass of tuberous roots at this time. When dry, place labeled tubers in cardboard boxes lined with newspaper and filled with barely moist wood shavings, peat moss, or vermiculite. Store the bulbs between 40-50 degrees in a darkened room. Check periodically to be sure tubers haven't rotted or begun to dry out (sprinkle gently with water).

Sit back with a cup of tea, reminisce about the summer, and make plans for next year.



--Sandy