



“From the Potting Shed”

Riverview Garden Club – Helpful Hints

October, 2023

Fall is for planting! October to early November is the best time for planting spring bulbs, perennials, trees and shrubs. Now's the time to plan for your spring garden by buying and planting the bulbs you want to grow in your beds, borders, and containers. Planting perennials and shrubs in the fall when the soil is still warm promotes root growth. There's less stress on new plants in the cool weather and increased rain helps plants get established.

Things to do this month...

In the flower garden:

Plant spring blooming bulbs

- this is peak time to plant bulbs, including tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, alliums, and crocuses.
- put them in the ground now because they need a long winter chill to get ready for their spring blooms
- plant them at least six weeks before a hard, ground-freezing frost
- buy several varieties of bulbs with a range of flowering periods so you can enjoy blooms from early to late spring.
- bury bulbs with the pointed end up to a depth about three times their diameter (for most tulip and daffodil bulbs, about 6 to 8 inches).
- for the greatest impact, plant them in clusters of five or more, rather than sticking a single bulb in the ground.
- to camouflage the bulb foliage when it begins to die back in the spring, intermingle your bulbs with perennials that have similar foliage, such as daylilies and hostas.

Plant cool season annuals

- add color to your fall garden with cool-season flowering plants that will often remain vibrant through November.
- violas and pansies are among the hardiest and most colorful of the cool-season annuals.
- include some ornamental kale and cabbage, which have centers that turn lovely pastel shades of white, pink, and purple when the temperatures drop.
- keep your fall annuals blooming longer by removing spent flowers.
- fall mums may come back the following spring if you plant them directly in the ground and cover them with a layer of mulch.

Plant trees, shrubs and perennials

- with air temperatures cooler than the soil, new top growth slows, allowing plants to focus their energy on root development in the still-warm soil.
- moisture from fall rains also help trees and shrubs establish strong root systems.
- spring-blooming broad-leaved evergreens, such as rhododendrons and azaleas, also prefer fall or early spring planting.

- Plant trees, shrubs, and perennials, at least four to six weeks before the ground freezes to give them enough time to become established.
- Keep trees and shrubs well-watered until the ground freezes to provide proper conditions for root growth
- Cover garden beds with several inches of organic mulch, such as shredded bark or leaves, to keep the soil warm longer and to minimize damage from winter freeze-thaw cycles.

Divide perennials

- fall is the best time to divide or move perennials that need more growing room, especially those that bloom in the spring or summer.
- divide and move daylilies, bearded iris, peonies, and garden phlox a few weeks before the first hard frost so your plants have time to recover from transplant shock and establish new roots.

Clean-Up and Mulch

- remove annuals from containers and landscapes and store your pots away for winter.
- compost healthy annuals; any diseased plants should be disposed of in the trash.
- cut back select perennials - once your perennials have gone dormant, it's a good idea to clean at least some of their foliage out of garden beds
- cut hostas down to the ground that have received slug damage during the growing season. Slugs lay their eggs in the dormant foliage, and removing it in fall will cut down on slug issues the following year

DO NOT cut these perennials back in fall:

- evergreen or semi-evergreen perennials like pinks (Dianthus), coral bells (Heuchera), foamy bells (Heucherella), foamflower (Tiarella), creeping phlox (Phlox subulata), bugleweed (Ajuga) and red-hot poker (Kniphofia)
- perennials with woody stems like rose mallow (Hibiscus), Russian sage (Perovskia), lavender (Lavandula), butterfly bush (Buddleia)
- perennials with winter interest like False Indigo (Baptisia), coneflowers (Echinacea), ornamental grasses, autumn stonecrop (Sedum), ornamental onion (Allium), Lenten roses (Helleborus)
- rake, shred, and mulch with leaves.
- spread the shredded leaves back onto your garden beds as mulch in late fall as the ground begins to freeze to keep weeds at bay, insulate your plants, and enrich the soil as the leaves break down.
- mulch newly planted perennials and shrubs that aren't well-rooted in yet to prevent the rootball from heaving out of the ground during the freeze/thaw cycles of winter.

In the vegetable garden:

- get a fall harvest by starting fast-growing varieties from seed or by purchasing transplants from local garden centers.
- plant another crop of spring greens such as spinach, leaf lettuce, arugula, and mustard greens because they require cooler soil for seed germination and they mature quickly.
- plant fast-growing root vegetables such as radishes, beets, and turnips that thrive in cool conditions and take less than two months to mature.
- plant onion sets and garlic cloves for harvest in late spring or summer of the following year.
- ***to determine the optimal time to plant fall crops from seed, you'll need to do some math. Check the back of the seed packet for the "days to maturity" and then count backwards from the average date of the first hard frost in your area. Because the growth rate of your plants will slow as the days shorten, add an additional week or two to determine your sow-by date.***
- if planting seeds in an area where you recently harvested summer crops, just rake lightly to loosen the topsoil and work in a bit of compost or other organic matter to help retain moisture.
- repurpose the pots you used to grow summer annuals by filling them with cool-season edibles, including lettuce, spinach, kale, chard, radishes, and carrots

Happy Fall Gardening!

Sources:

"What to Plant in Fall", by Anne Balogh, Garden Design Newsletter, September 28, 2023.

"10 Fall Gardening Tasks to Make Your Garden Sing Next Spring!", Proven Winners Newsletter, September, 2023.