



Growing Guru

Nancy M. Eyster-Smith
neystersmith@bentley.edu
Waltham Garden Club



My biggest fall surprise is a volunteer cosmos that sprouted in a large barrel months ago and had grown to 8 feet tall without any buds or flowers. Suddenly on Sept 30 it had buds, and a few days later burst into bloom.

TIPS FOR FALL & GOOD PRACTICES

SAVE LEAVES AS FREE FERTILIZER: Although the city will take away your leaves and other yard waste, I encourage you to save all your leaves in compost bins or directly in garden beds to return nutrients to the soil, prevent weed growth, and help retain moisture. This article on [5 Great Ideas For Your Leaves](#) explains more.

EMPTY AND PROTECT CLAY AND PORCELAIN POTS: Soil that holds water can freeze and thaw over winter, and this can cause these types of pots to crack and flake apart. It is best to empty and place in a dry place. If outside storage is necessary, turn the pots upside down and cover, if possible, to keep drier. If you have a perennial that will survive the winter currently growing in such a pot, you can probably lift the whole root ball out, put in a protected area, and surround with additional soil or leaves for overwintering. Pop it back in the pot next spring.

MAKE CUTTINGS OF PLANTS THAT CAN OVERWINTER INDOORS IN WATER: We all like an early start on our spring plants, so consider making cuttings before frost of coleus, impatiens, spurflowers, geraniums, and other frost sensitive plants. Remove lower leaves so not decaying in water and place in water in vases, drinking glasses, or even spaghetti sauce jars. Change the water periodically through winter. With good luck the plants will root and be ready to plant next spring. Also did you know you can keep your bare-rooted geraniums in an open paper bag in your basement until spring? While they may look awful by spring, once replanted they bounce back to life - a great way to save those special ones. Find more information here on [Overwintering Geraniums](#).

PLANT SEEDS THAT NEED COLD STRATIFICATION TO GERMINATE: We tend to think of seed planting in spring, but a lot of our favorite perennials (columbine, blazing star, cone flower, balloon flower) need to be planted in fall so that the seeds are cold stratified, which helps break seed dormancy in spring. Some varieties only need a month of cold, while others may require longer.