



October - November - December 2021

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This past summer once again brought a few problems to Connecticut: a late and cool start confused both plants and gardeners and threw off many carefully orchestrated bloom times. Then a burst of unseasonal warm weather arrived and more bloom times went off-kilter! A hot July and frequent showers continued to push the growing season timetables around. And then we battled heavy rain, hurricane threats and floods! But still the blooms kept coming! No wonder gardeners in New England wonder if they aren't living in a combat zone! But thankfully the gardening year is a circle and every season brings something to the party to be treasured and admired. The sunny, still days and cooler nights of early autumn are a special gardening gift as we wait for the flaming colors of fall to light our way to the winter to come. So let us happily celebrate the arrival of autumn in all its glory! After all, people come from all over the world to admire the fiery beauty we tend to take for granted here in New England! Maybe this year we'll get a true Indian Summer ... warm, sunny, calm days that come only after a true killing frost!

As the gardening days begin to wind down, there is something very comforting about repeating the annual ritual of putting the garden to bed. It takes place over many weeks and allows us to savor these last golden days and to take our time over the chores. Finishing the season and tucking your garden in for the winter takes a little planning ... but leaving your garden neat and tidy will pay huge dividends in the spring.

Many perennials really go dormant on their own schedule and your main role is to tidy up, cutting things back in late October and November. Do not cut back plants too early as it could produce a sudden spurt of new growth. Wait until the plant's leaves are yellow or brown and, as long as no disease is present, remove everything to the compost pile, layering in some fallen leaves. It is actually easier to remove the leaves on Daylilies in the spring when only a gentle tug will be needed but you can take away their dead leaves in the fall. Snow is still the best insulator around so don't worry if you leave some plants standing.

It's also a good time to reflect on the garden year now ending. What went well, what didn't? What new plants would you like to try? What plants no longer fit in? Are some of your flowering bushes over-grown? Does your basic garden plan still work for your current lifestyle? Nature never sits still and our gardens change too. Fall is the perfect time to adapt the garden to a new design that better suits the way you choose to garden now.

A general guide, **Putting Your Garden to Bed for the Winter**, is available on the web site and at the nursery.

Upcoming Workshop

As the holidays approach, Acer Gardens will once again hold its popular Holiday Decorating Workshop, concentrating on decorating containers and wreaths. Learn how to bring the beauty of the season into your home and add your own touches to this festive holiday time! Multiple sessions will be held in a greenhouse, with masks required. Available spaces will be limited but an Email announcement will be sent out 2 weeks before the scheduled workshop so that you will have time to sign-up in advance and reserve your place. We've missed the workshops as much as you have; it's a wonderful way to start the holiday season rolling!

Plan Ahead for the Holidays

Holiday Flowers, Wreaths and Containers

Wreaths, containers, swags, roping, bows, arrangements, mixed greens and assorted decorations (all weather-proof) will be available at the nursery starting the week before Thanksgiving. Gift certificates are available at the nursery and on our on-line store but we will have many other Holiday gift options available at the nursery including our popular decorated bird-houses. Both indoor and outdoor containers can be filled with your choice of greenery.

Specialty poinsettias in unusual colors and shapes are real attention getters. Amaryllis are planted (in different stages of development) and ready to go. Consult with us well in advance if you have something special in mind ... there's a wealth of dried material and decoration available to truly personalize your gift. We love to work with you to bring that holiday glow to your home and to make your presents really special!

Christmas Trees

Fresh-cut only a few days before Thanksgiving, Douglas, Fraser Fir and White Fir Christmas trees will be available at the nursery. Trees can be chosen and tagged in advance for future pick-up or delivery (for a fee). It's definitely a good idea to place your order early.

The Plant of the Month

The plant of the Month is available at the nursery checkout table from the first of each month on. These plants are carefully chosen to showcase current bloom and are featured at the nursery from April through October.

October : **Heuchera (Coral Bells)**

Zone: 4-9 Height: 8-18" Spread: 1-2'

One of the easiest perennials to grow, Heuchera's foliage comes in almost every color imaginable! Leaves can be patterned. Ruffled, wavy or smooth which is why it combines so well with other late-blooming flowers. Flowers ... in hues of coral, red, white or pink ... are attractive to the last of the butterflies and are very long-lasting in arrangements. This plant does well in partial shade, prefers a humus-rich soil and does well in containers.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

Leave grass clippings on the lawn to decompose. Re-seed areas as needed. Around the second or third week in November apply fertilizer.

Don't fertilize or prune roses now --- wait until spring. Tie back any long climbing rose canes to prevent wind whip. Hill up the soil and mulch around the base of Hybrid Teas before the ground freezes. Rugosas are very hardy and need no attention other than trimming back exceptionally long canes which might be damaged during the winter.

Do your transplanting and moving now in order to give plant material time to settle in. Hosta, Daylilies, Black-Eyed Susans and Bearded Iris can all be divided now. Keep the new transplants well watered throughout the rest of the growing season and make sure your transplants are mulched going into the winter.

Let ornamental grasses stay in place. They suit our winter landscape and also act as a bird refuge. Wait until spring to cut down and divide grasses.

New trees and bushes can be planted in the fall but established trees and shrubs should only be transplanted in the spring.

Don't prune your Rhododendrons and Hydrangeas now ... they set next year's flowers right after they bloom and you could lose next spring's blossom.

If you are mulching new plantings, use Double Ground hard and soft bark mulch or bagged cedar mulch. They carry no diseases or insects and breaks down nicely, adding organic material to the soil over time. Bark mulch is always available in bulk at the nursery, the mulch should be applied 1-2" deep and kept a few inches away from the stems or trunks of your plant material.

Start to apply deer repellents now. Creatures of habit, deer quickly get used to certain scents and are lazy about changing established routes so it's a good idea to change repellents often.

Seasonal Reminders

Keep weeding and dead-heading. Many Connecticut weeds routinely live through the winter!

Early October is your last chance to take cuttings from Coleus and Begonias, root them in water and plant them up. They make quick, easy house plants and will give you indoor color all winter long. Do not be surprised if your red Coleus becomes variegated during the course of the winter ... when planted out in the spring, it will quickly revert to its original color. Your rooted and potted Coleus plants can be planted back outside next spring at the same time you plant your annuals!

These plants/bushes should not be cut back until spring:

Artemisia	Caryopteris	Lavender
Bergenia	Dianthus	Lirope
Buddleia	Euphorbia	Montauk Daisies
Campanula	Hellebore	Perovskia
Carex	Heuchera	Stachys

Remember to store Wilt-Stop, insecticides, fungicides and other "goeey" products in the laundry room or a frost-free cellar. Granular fertilizer and seeds can be safely stored in the garage.

Fall Planting

Fall planting is a great time to get a jump on the next season and to plan for fuller and longer bloom periods in the garden ... it is the perfect time to plant or transplant most perennials. shrubs. The combination of warm soil and reasonably dependable rain leads to good root growth and will give your new plantings a strong head start. In fact, fall planted perennials develop larger, better-established root systems and start to make quicker growth in the spring. Plants with the head start of fall planting appear to adapt better to summer heat. If you are adding to established perennial beds, remember that the "spread" dimension means that the plant will fill in space North to South as well as East to West! Give those new plants plenty of room to grow!

The nice thing about fall planting is that it takes place over a longer period of time, without the frenzy and urgency of spring planting. How do you know when to start? Of course, it depends on what you're planting (perennials first, bulbs last, trees and bushes in-between) but nature provides subtle signs. Some gardeners wait for nighttime temperatures to get down around 50°. Others wait for the hummingbirds and crickets to leave and the squirrels to start hoarding acorns or for the foliage to take center stage. Fall planting time is definitely here the first time you smell wood smoke or notice reddening rose hips you missed when you deadheaded the climbers. It's a wonderful time in the gardener's year!

As you look at your perennial beds now, you can identify current "gaps" and add something to extend the season. The nursery has many fall-blooming perennials available such as Japanese Anemones, Sedum, Boltonia, Cimicifuga, Dendranthema, Asters, Eupatorium, Lirope, Vernonia, Kirengeshoma and ornamental Grasses. The fall is also a good time to consider adding a few native plants. Many natives have an "open" look to their growth habit which blends particularly well with the perennials currently in bloom and their sun/shade requirements are very adaptable. Think about adding New England Aster, purple Coneflower, Cardinal Flower, Bee Balm, Tradescantia or Persicaria. Come to the nursery and see how full the plant tables are with fall-bloomers!

All early-spring blooming perennials should be planted in the fall including Phlox subulata (Creeping Phlox), Iberis (Candytuft), Hellebore (Lenten Rose), Primulas and Pulmonaria.

Dividing in the Fall

Fall is the ideal time to divide those perennials which tend to form large clumps. The soil is warm and the new divisions will have time to form a strong root system before winter. Water the new plants well as we head into winter.

Daylilies

Daylilies are adaptable and tough, requiring very little on-going maintenance and care but they will produce their best blooms if they are routinely divided every 3-5 years. Division is good for the plants and an easy way to expand your plantings.

Use a garden fork to lift the clump from the ground. Start by inserting the fork into the ground 6-12" away from the base of the plant. Push down on the handle and pry the clump up and out of the soil. Work your way around the plant, doing this, until the clump is free. Lift the clump from the hole and lay it on the ground or on a tarp. Pull the clump apart, discarding the center. You should have at least 2 distinct clumps remaining. A really large clump can be divided and then re-divided if necessary. Replant the divisions and keep well watered until the new daylilies settle in.

Hostas

Hostas can be divided in the spring or fall and there is no particular advantage to which you choose. It is helpful to pick a time when the weather is cool and moist and in a year of drought that is not easy!

With a sharp spade, cut around the outside of the hosta clump. Disturbing the roots as little as possible, pry and lift the entire clump out of the ground. With the spade, hack off smaller chunks, no smaller than 5" in diameter. Replant the divisions at the same depth as the original clump was growing. Water well, but do not fertilize. Mulch lightly.

Fall-Flowering Natives

As our fall chill begins to appear, there is a final explosion of bright color from some of our natives. These late-season flowers are just as irresistible to butterflies as they are to humans. Because they bloom so late in the season, these versatile perennials can be tucked into odd spots where they will not disturb "the color scheme" ... combine them with other fall flowers and grasses and they are "the color scheme"!

Solidago canadensis (Goldenrod)

H: 1-5'

Prefers full sun

Well-drained soil

Its blazing shades of yellow bring substance to the fall garden and add height to naturalistic plantings. It is happiest in full sun and will not do well in shade. Dead-heading will prevent self-seeding; divide in the spring or fall as clumps will increase steadily. Goldenrod does not cause hay fever (that comes from Ragweed) and is perfect for a casual, low-maintenance fall border. Cutting them back by one-half in early summer will encourage branching and make for a fuller plant.

Chelone (Turtlehead)

H: 2-4'

Best in shaded areas

Happy in wet soil

Chelone blooms steadily as the days shorten, producing weather-resistant spikes of flowers ranging from white to pink and purple. Unlike many fall flowers, it will grow happily in partial shade with moist soil, naturalizing well. This perennial looks best when planted in groups and allowed to colonize ... a bonus as it doesn't need division. Chelone adapts well to wet situations (by a stream or in a rain garden) and is very attractive to butterflies. Deer and rabbits will usually give it a miss.

Great Grasses

Ornamental grasses are almost the only maintenance-free plant a gardener can grow! Their beauty and diversity is remarkable, they thrive in diverse soil conditions and are usually free of insect and disease problems. Combining well with other flowers and bushes, grasses offer a wide range of height, texture and drama. They ask only for full sun, good drainage and plenty of spreading room. In return, they provide 12-month landscape interest, a safe winter home for birds and a focal point in your landscape. Planted as a specimen plant or in drifts, grasses bring an almost architectural quality to your garden and attract butterflies and song-birds. Consider:

Fountain Grass (Pennisetum)

H: 2-3'

Prefers full sun

Well-drained soil

This grass features a compact growth habit and finely textured foliage which will sway in every passing breeze. Fountain grass works well in mass plantings and is considered trouble-free and reliant with no pest problems. Deep water during drought periods. This plant will tolerate wind and salt spray, can be divided in the spring and will do well in containers. Deer resistant, it will attract songbirds.

Little Blue Stem (Schizachyrium scoparium)

H: 1-3'

Full sun only

Well-drained soil

A finely textured clumping grass from the prairies and an excellent choice for native plantings. Grown in full sun, it will add structure and is very adaptable to most soils. Emerges late in the spring but many cultivars grow to 2-3' over the summer. In the fall, this grass turns a rosy-rust color that lasts all winter.

Maidengrass (Miscanthus)

H: 4-6'+

Full sun

Well-drained soil

This ornamental grass will form large clumps with silvery-green blades which turn bronze after the first frost. This plant can be used in groups as a screen, growing 3-5' wide, but also shines as a specimen plant in mixed perennial or shrub beds. Miscanthus will handle salt or drought as, once established, it needs only occasional watering.

Switch Grass (Panicum)

H: 2-3'

Full sun to part shade

Average to wet soil

This grass is clump-forming but retains its columnar shape for much of the season. The foliage is topped in mid-summer by pink-tinged panicles which hover over the grass like a cloud. Seed plumes persist well into the winter with seeds a good food source for over-wintering birds. Masses well and may naturalize.

Enjoying Fall Bushes

Many summer-blooming shrubs give you the added bonus of fall color and berries long after they have bloomed. Some have stems which stand out in the winter landscape and provide an unexpected punch of color to what is often a dull, gray time of year. Consider adding:

Callicarpa dichotama (Purple Beautyberry)

H: 3-4'

Sun to light shade

Well-drained soil

Pink flowers in late summer are followed by striking purple berries lasting through the winter. Very attractive to cardinals, this shrub is very graceful. Since it flowers and fruits on new growth, cut back to 18" in the spring.

Cornus sericea (Redtwig Dogwood)

H: 5-9'

Sun to part shade

Average soil

This vigorous shrub has white flowers in early summer but its real glory comes in the fall. Bright red stems last all winter so plant where you can see it from the house. The best color comes on young stems so prune heavily in early spring. This shrub can be grown in a moist area.

Hamamelis virginiana (Witch hazel)

H: 8-10'

Sun to part shade

Well-drained soil

This shrub's leathery green leaves turn golden yellow in early fall, followed by narrow yellow flowers. Native to woodlands, Witch hazel naturalizes very well. Low maintenance, the bush needs pruning only for shaping and removing dead wood.

Ilex verticillata (Winterberry)

H: 6-10'

Sun to part shade

Evenly moist soil

An obvious choice for native gardens, this shrub's red berries last well into the winter and are most attractive to birds. Planted in mass, Winterberry will form large colonies. One male plant is needed for pollination to ensure fruit set.

Itea virginica (Virginia Sweetspire)

H: 3-4'

Sun to shade

Wet or dry soil

This highly adaptable bush has white flowers in May and June and shows well planted in clusters. It will live cheerfully on the edge of a stream or pond but tolerates dry conditions well. Rich burgundy red foliage appears in the fall.

Late-Season Color

Not all Autumn plants showcase shades of maroon, orange and bronze. It is still possible to keep the rosy pinks and cream going and purple-toned foliage is always a plus and a great garden unifier. Consider finding room for:

Anemone japonica

H: 18-36"

Part sun to part shade

Well-drained soil

These elegant, late-blooming plants look best planted against a background which will showcase their white or clear pink blooms as they rise above mounded deep-green foliage. In bloom through October, their long stems help make long-lasting cut flowers. They thrive in light shade but can handle morning sun. Happy in humus-rich soil, they should be mulched over the winter.

Sedum

H: 9-30"

Full sun

Well-drained soil

Thriving in full sun to part shade, Sedums come into their own in the fall garden as their dusty pinks and roses combine with other fall stars. Deer and rabbit resistant, they are a wild-life magnet for bees and butterflies, often covered with bees late into the season. A wide range of heights makes this perennial particularly versatile. The flowers fade to a rich brown that can add winter interest to the garden and provide birds protection.

Cotinus (Smoke Bush)

H: 6 – 10'

Full sun

Well-drained soil

Smoke Bush is often used as an individual garden specimen primarily because of the fall purple leaves found on some cultivars. The leaves, long a favorite of florists, flatter the flowers of almost every late bloomer in the garden. They make a great backdrop to a fall perennial bed and are easy to care for.

Often-Asked Questions

When do I plant my garlic?

Plant both hard-neck and soft-neck garlic after a hard frost. Pick a new area in the vegetable garden with fertile, well-drained soil. Take the garlic cloves apart and plant 4-6" apart 1 ½-2" deep. Mulch lightly with straw. The garlic will start to grow now. In the spring, you will see more growth and the bud will form scapes. Cut that stalk off ... it's delicious sautéed. After the foliage yellows and browns in midsummer you can start to harvest and dry the garlic. Store the garlic in bunches in a cool location. The nursery has 5 different kinds of garlic bulbs available ... all will do well in this climate.

My Hostas look awful? Should I cut them down to the ground before winter?

Yes, as fall comes on, all the Hostas look awful! This is, in reality, a very low maintenance plant. When the night temperatures dip below 50°, the outer leaves droop, leaf production stops and the leaves fall over. Cut back the entire plant to the ground and don't worry ... they'll be back in the spring! You can lightly mulch to protect the crowns of the plant. As the new leaves emerge in the spring, brush the mulch away to encourage new growth.

My herbs have gone mad! Is it too late to dry them?

Fortunately, most herbs can be dried in the microwave! Cover a paper plate with paper towels and arrange some cut herbs (don't overcrowd) over the towels. Cover with another paper towel and microwave on high for 1 minute. Check to see if the herbs are dry ... if not, give them short 10 second bursts to finish the process. Let cool, and then strip the leaves into glass jars or little Ziploc sandwich bags. Store in a dry place. Do not freeze. Dried this way, the herbs stay green.

I intend to plant Alliums this fall for the first time. Any advice?

The key to growing terrific alliums (and giving flower beds a long-lasting “WOW” factor) is choosing the right location! Alliums are happiest planted in soil that stays dry. If your soil does not drain quickly, add a little sand to the soil around the Alliums. After planting, sprinkle on some Bulb Tone and give the bulbs a handful of the mixture in the summer when the blooms have faded. Alliums should be planted at a depth 3 times the diameter of the bulb (a 2” bulb is planted 6” deep). Pinch the faded bloom head off before it has a chance to set seed but leave the foliage and stem to feed the bulb for next year’s flowers. In general, Alliums are slow to multiply but if you find that you have a large clump with foliage but no flowers, lift, divide and reset.

Is fall a good time to put compost on flower beds?

Fall is the ideal time to spread compost. Weather conditions are often drier in the fall making it easier to work compost into existing flower beds. The rain, snow and freezes and thaws of our winters will help it work down into the soil.

The ideal garden soil texture is a sandy loam which allows for air and water movement. Adding organic matter to soil ... nitrogen, phosphorus and/or potassium ... encourages beneficial microbial activity and provides a nutritional benefit. Some proven types of organic matter include compost, peat moss and grass clippings.

Changing to Fall/Winter Containers

Mums are not the only seasonal choice for replanting tired-looking containers. If the container is completely winter proof, perennial grasses can be planted and will provide a refuge for birds as well as decorating the landscape. Adding gourds will give an Autumnal touch. Heucheras, Euphorbias and Ivy can be combined for a new look. Cabbages can provide a splash with their beautiful leaves and pansies will add a cheerful note. Window boxes can be re-planted to brighten the winter landscape. Use small cultivars of Boxwood, Cypress or Euphorbia to establish a fresh look and tuck in a few pansies. Pansies are remarkably resilient and may surprise you by reappearing early in spring! Some of the newer dwarf-shrubs can be placed into containers for the winter and then transplanted to the garden in the spring. Be sure your container can withstand frost and dropping temperatures. If a light frost threatens, extend bloom time by bringing your containers and hanging baskets into the garage overnight. Put them back outside in the morning and continue to enjoy their color.

Container plantings for fall rely heavily on using the colors of fall foliage as a way to extend the season. Come to the nursery and see how many choices are waiting on the benches! Once your containers are planted, stop applying liquid fertilizer which might encourage too much new growth. Keep watering the containers until the soil freezes.

Containers can also make the switch to winter very easily. Think about adding small evergreens which can be transplanted into the garden in the spring. Back them with colored stems for a little punch. Use branches with berries and add cut evergreens and cones as the holidays approach. Place the winter containers where they can be seen from the house as a way to connect the outside landscape to the inside.

Autumn's Garden Stars

Asters

If late-blooming Dahlias are considered one of the glories of the fall garden, Asters are the glue that holds everything together. Available in an incredible range of colors, Asters bring zest to a fall garden. Their long period of bloom (late summer through fall) and wide height range makes them invaluable in a mixed bed. Mingling well with other fall perennials, Asters establish themselves easily, thrive in average soil and will take sun to partial shade. Some bloom in clouds of pale flowers; others flaunt deep shades of purple. All combine well with native plants and will reward you with steady growth. (Cutting the plants back in early June will prevent "Aster sprawl".) Cut Asters back after the foliage has died. Divide every 3-5 years (in early spring) to keep the plants under control; remove unwanted seedlings as you spot them.

Dendranthemum

This is the true perennial mum. Mid-sized, they require no special care all summer long and then, suddenly, in fall they produce a loose mass of daisy-like flowers in a wide variety of colors ranging through shades of pink to apricot and pale yellow. Most of them spread so give them lots of room and plant in well-drained soil. It's a good idea to cut the plants back a little in June to keep them from getting out of control in their exuberance!

Montauk Daisy

This daisy-like plant with its white flowers and deep green, shiny foliage, will bloom well into fall. Established plants have a real presence in the fall garden with their long stalks, are highly attractive to butterflies and bees and are considered both salt and drought tolerant. Montauks will thrive in full sun to partial shade and should be cut back in early summer to keep growth more contained. Regular dead-heading will generate maximum bloom. Divide the clumps every 2-3 years to maintain vigor.

Houseplants

By the middle of October, before frost, your houseplants should all be back in the house after their summer outdoors. Inspect the plants carefully before you bring them in and treat for any bugs or pests. Cut back or prune the plant if necessary and re-pot with fresh soil. Available at the nursery, Acer Gardens' bagged Alpine Soil Mix is ideal for potting house plants as it promotes good drainage. Grouping plants together is an easy way to generate humidity (especially if all the plants are on a water-filled humidity tray) and to showcase diverse foliage and plant forms. Fertilize the houseplants lightly every 2 weeks.

Rex Begonia (fabulous foliage), Ferns (try Japanese Painted Fern or Boston Fern), Coleus, English ivy, Pilea and Peperomia are all good choices for indoor color all winter long. Most houseplants don't like the direct sun of a windowsill although Cyclamen, Gardenia, and Geraniums actually prefer a south facing window. East and west facing windows are fine for most plants but you need to understand the growth habits of your plants. Leaves that are pale green or stems that are weak or too long indicate that your plants need more light. Placing your plant properly is key to growing healthy house plants and light levels are important. And remember ... you may have light coming in through a window now but the angle of the sun is very different in the winter (especially after the end of Daylight Savings Time) so make adjustments as needed when you place your plants. Grow lights are often helpful and some plants thrive when placed under ordinary house lamps. Watching your house plant's performance and monitoring its growth will tell you what it needs. As the days begin to lengthen, those needs may start to change.

Standard light definitions:

Bright light: a sunny southern or western facing window with bright, direct light all day.

Indirect light: an eastern facing window or the interior of a room that faces south or west.

Low light: rooms with north facing windows provide little direct light.

Getting The Garden Ready for Winter

Last spring, New England gardeners discovered, once again, what a long, cold, wet winter can do to trees, shrubs and perennials! Extreme cold isn't always the biggest problem. Early cold spells can damage plants that haven't gone through the normal "hardening off" period. Dry winds can "burn" conifer needles and broadleaf evergreen foliage. Unexpected midwinter thaws can fool plants into breaking dormancy too early, leaving them vulnerable to the next cold snap. Freeze/thaw cycles can heave plants out of the ground. Deer, chipmunk, rabbits and other critters will gnaw bark during the winter and leave evergreens and shrubs damaged. Snow is actually our friend! A constant layer of snow cover provides moisture and helps insulate soil and roots against fluctuating temperatures. Here in Southern New England, gardeners, as well as skiers, hope for snow!

Healthy plants are more likely to survive winter unscathed. Start your winter protection routine in autumn. Stop fertilizing plants 6 weeks before the first fall frost to help plants harden off. Water thoroughly until the ground freezes.

Perennials

Most plants need to be cut back after heavy, killing frosts to prevent disease and pest problems in the spring but doing this too early can deprive roots of gaining energy from the fading leaves. Any diseased or bug-infested leaves should be bagged and put in the garbage, not the compost pile. Compost is a soil conditioner, not a fertilizer, so apply it now to get a jump on spring. Do a final weeding. Edge your beds and start the next gardening year looking neat and tidy. A light winter mulch will help keep the soil temperature even. Waiting until the ground is frozen to apply mulch will discourage rodents from making nests and building condos.

Shade Plants

Ferns. If your ferns are growing in a natural, woodland setting, you can leave the dying fronds in place. They will decompose naturally and the new fronds will be able to easily push up through the spent foliage in the spring. The spent fronds will protect the fern's crown throughout the winter and you can tidy up the plant in the spring. Some gardeners wait to tidy up ferns in the spring until the deer have lost interest in new fronds.

Hosta. Hostas are very low on the fall maintenance scale! After a hard frost, cut the entire plant back to the ground (Removing the dead leaves will discourage slugs.) Don't compost the dead leaves as you could spread disease. Light mulch (only an inch or two) will discourage pests and protect the root system. Hostas can be divided in the fall before the first frost. Each new plant should be watered well but not fertilized until early spring.

Evergreens

Evergreens need to be well-watered before the start of winter but not fertilized. Do not cut back your evergreens in the fall. If an evergreen has really exceeded its limits, take a few cuttings for Christmas decorations. A late November application of an anti-transparent (such as Wilt-Stop) will help to protect your evergreens from winter desiccation and can also be sprayed on hydrangeas and Japanese maples. For best results, re-apply after a warm winter period in mid-February.

Fall is the perfect evergreen planting time. If they are visible from the house, evergreens can add a strong vertical accent to the landscape and give you “green” to look at through the dreary days of winter. Firs, Pines and Cypress offer a wide range of color shades, shapes and sizes to choose from. They also provide a level of privacy which deciduous trees and bushes cannot offer. Because the air is cooler in the fall, but the soil is still warm, freshly planted evergreens have a more friendly setting in which to establish themselves. Moisture is slower to evaporate. Give your new evergreen 1” of water a week until the ground freezes.

The Vegetable Garden

Leave carrots, leeks, parsnips, radishes, beets, kale, Swiss chard and turnips in the garden so that you can harvest them through the fall. If you are storing root crops, cut down the tops to about ½” but don’t wash the vegetables. Keep them in a dark, cool place, above freezing. When you harvest your onions, let them dry outside in the sun for a few days before cleaning them and bringing them inside for storage. When its foliage turns yellow, dig up potato plants. The potato vine can act as the host to late tomato blight so be careful to discard all parts of the potato plant in a bag in the garbage can, not in the compost heap. (In fact, tomatoes and all squashes should also be discarded in bags.) After a killing frost, pull up tomato, squash and bean plants.

Clean out the vegetable garden. Remove all old plants and fruits (roots, leaves and stems) but do not put them in the compost bin ... burn or put in garbage bags to help prevent the spread of disease and insects. Double dig the empty bed and add compost to be ready for early spring plantings. Adding shredded leaves sprinkled with some granular organic fertilizer will add nitrogen to the soil. Cover your strawberries lightly with straw not hay (which harbors weeds). Remember to make a chart of the layout of your vegetable bed so that you can rotate the crops next spring. Re-assess your plantings to decide if you grew the right “mix” for your family’s eating habits and leave room to try something new and different.

Take a moment to think about ways to expand next year’s vegetable garden by re-arranging space. More abundant harvests are possible by not planting just in rows. Peas, cucumbers and tomatoes can all be grown on stakes or trellises as long as you allow for the weight of the mature plant. Adding a raised bed can expand your options. Many new varieties of vegetables have been developed recently to accommodate gardeners who grow vegetables in containers on the patio. Small-sized vegetables currently available include bush cucumbers and patio tomatoes but new varieties are constantly being introduced.

Poinsettias and Amaryllis

Poinsettia

Some Poinsettias can remain in bloom for 2-6 months! They prefer a day temperature of 67 degrees, hate drafts and like a humid environment and the bright, indirect light of an east window. This year, the nursery has many new varieties available ... even some pink-colored Poinsettias. Our Poinsettias will be ready for sale just before Thanksgiving.

Amaryllis

Acer has a remarkable selection of amaryllis bulbs available this year, including a wide selection of unusual shapes and color combinations in # 1 size for you to plant in your own containers. Allow 8-12 weeks from potting to bloom and start them at 10 day intervals so that you will have flowers all winter long. Plant one bulb, firmly, to a pot and place in indirect sunlight at room temperature. Room temperature of 60-75 is ideal. (Be sure to place a saucer under the pot.) Water after potting and then only when the soil is dry to the touch. Do not mist.

As the flowers fade, cut off the entire stalk. You may get lucky and get another bloom! Amaryllis should spend the summer outdoors in the sun. Around Labor Day, stop any watering, cut off the leaves and store the bulbs in their pots in the cellar, away from any sun. Do not water them until you are ready to start the forcing cycle again. Be patient. Amaryllis can be slow to get going!

It's Bulb Time!

A beautiful spring garden depends heavily on bulbs. Given enough moisture, bulbs will grow in almost any kind of garden soil. This year, Acer Gardens has many different kinds of bulbs available, with a greatly expanded selection. Tulips are back in many vibrant colors as are the familiar Daffodils and Hyacinths. Bulbs are an easy way to add color and diversity to existing beds and will provide welcome color after a long winter! It's a good idea to plant a few unexpected/unusual bulbs in areas you can see from the house. Try tucking them in under low, spreading evergreens so that they will poke through the branches. Daffodils and Paper Whites for forcing and large-sized Amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted, will also be available at the nursery.

Don't be afraid to mix-and-match your bulbs and to plant in drifts. Careful planning can give you bulb bloom from March to May. Naturalizing gives an informal look and is a particularly useful technique for bulbs that multiply easily. Once flowers fade, the foliage keeps growing so choose a site that doesn't need early spring mowing. Bulbs want well-drained soil. Avoid planting bulbs in areas that remain wet for a long time as they may rot. Oddly enough, some smaller bulbs simply don't have a true "pointy side up" so just lay the bulb on its side when you plant it; it will generally right itself and grow toward the sun. In general, bulbs should be planted to a depth of 3 times the diameter of the bulbs and then fertilized. Bulbs send out roots soon after planting so, unless rain is forecast, give your newly planted bulbs a good watering.

Before planting, store your bulbs in a cool, dry place with low humidity away from heat and strong sunlight. Wait to plant until the ground has cooled down to around 55 F so that they don't grow unnecessary top growth and waste their energies. Late October to mid-November is optimum planting time for this area although Lilies should not be planted until well into November. As you plant your bulbs, add Bulb Tone fertilizer before back-filling the dirt. When the bulbs have bloomed in the spring and the foliage has died back, top dress the bulbs again with Bulb Tone.

Daffodils should be planted in well-draining soil where they will get 5-6 hours of direct sunlight. That sunlight (after they have bloomed) will help them produce next year's flowers. Fertilize the bulbs lightly as the shoots emerge in early spring. After the daffodils have bloomed, wait at least 8 weeks before cutting off the foliage. Don't be tempted to braid the leaves ... they are working to help produce next year's flowers!

Photograph your garden before you plant your bulbs and mark the photographs so that you know where the new bulbs have been situated. Many gardeners keep a special "bulb" album to help them remember plantings.

Tuck-In Bulbs

Now is the perfect time to plan for those first splashes of color which will be so welcome after whatever winter throws at us this year! **Tuck-In Bulbs** are small, easy to plant, early bloomers and the very first source of nectar and pollen for returning bees. Site them near the front door, mailbox or garage doors; tuck them into rock gardens, pop them under deciduous trees or scatter them at the edge of the lawn. Plant them in abundance for the greatest effect and keep the look informal.

All these bulbs are available now at Acer Gardens in The Garden Shed and planting can begin now ... you can have blooms from late March to early May by planting some of these:

Camassia:	Blooming after the daffodils, Camassia needs regular moisture to thrive, Stalks stand 24-30" tall, increasing yearly and suitable for cut flowers.
Galanthus	Signaling the end of winter, Snowdrops have literally been known to poke through snow! The white, nodding flowers are lovely when massed.
Crocus	Often the earliest flower we see in the spring, crocus are happy in partial shade. Only 4-6" tall, they are easy to grow and will naturalize.
Eranthis	The bright yellow flowers of Winter Aconite brighten many late winter days, often blooming before the crocus.
Scilla siberica	Still called Siberian squill by many people, these tiny (4") sky-blue flowers grow on strong stems. Give them sun to part shade; they may self-sow.
Hyacinthoides	Bluebells, both the Spanish and English varieties, are happy in partial shade. Forming clusters, these blue flowers are a welcome sign of spring.
Leucojum aestivum	The Summer Snowflake blooms in late Spring, topping out at 12". Plant in large clusters to showcase the clear white flowers.

Forcing Bulbs

Forcing and growing bulbs indoors gives us a way to have flowers blooming even with snow on the ground and makes a great family winter project. "Forcing" is simply a way of making a bulb produce leaves and flowers ahead of its natural outdoor schedule. You speed up the process by manipulating time and temperature.

Almost any container can be used for forcing bulbs but you will need a run-off saucer under the container if it has drainage holes. Fill the container 2/3 full of soil and moisten. Place the bulbs (close together but not touching) and gently press down. Add soil to the top of the container, water, and put in a cool, dark place like a refrigerator or unheated garage/cellar. Chilling for at least 6-8 weeks will imitate dormancy. Flowering will take about 12 weeks for snowdrops, crocus and daffodils and about 16 weeks for tulips. When you see shoots about 3" above the soil line, bring the bulbs into a cool location. When the foliage and buds are well developed, move the pots to a bright, sunny window.

Forcing paper-whites is particularly easy because the bulbs do not require a chilling period and need only 5-6 weeks from planting to bloom. You'll have Christmas flowers if you start your paper-whites by November 10. Plant at 2-week intervals and enjoy blooms from Thanksgiving to Easter.

Paper-whites grow best using the stones and water method: take a waterproof bowl and fill it 2/3 full of gravel or small, decorative stones, usually white. Insert the base of the bulbs so that they sit firmly and add more stones but do not cover them. Pour in water up to the base of the bulbs, replenishing as needed, and store in a cool, dark place (usually 2-3 weeks) until first growth appears. Do not fertilize the bulbs. Move them to a bright, sunny window.

Forcing is very hard on most bulbs and they will not bloom again. Tulips should just be thrown out. Amaryllis will re-bloom successfully (see above directions.)

Acer Gardens' information sheet on Forcing Bulbs is available on the web site and at the nursery.

Last Chores

Clean out the bird feeders and prepare them for the coming season. Store bird seed in metal garbage cans with tight-fitting lids to discourage access by mice.

Empty containers, clean and place in the garage. Some alpine troughs (Hypertufa) can be left out if placed near the house but stone planters are not winter-proof in this climate and should be stored in the garage.

Clean out the wheelbarrow and discard any damaged garden gloves/tools. Clean and sharpen garden tools. Leave everything tidy on the garden shelves. Some gardeners claim an open jar (or small Ziploc bag) of dried mint leaves left near the house entrance from the garage helps to discourage mice from entering.

Drain and store the hoses. Turn off all outside water faucets. Hardware stores are now carrying simple snap-on winter covers for outside faucets.

General Reminder

Acer Gardens will close on 12/23 re-opening, weather permitting, the last week of March 2022.

Keep checking Acer Gardens web site for on-going announcements. Enjoy our Instagram photos and remember: Spring will come and we'll all be back in the garden!

Acer Gardens
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