



October - November - December 2019

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There's an old saying: "If you've worn shorts and a parka in the same day, you live in New England!" The last six weeks have certainly driven that point home as gardeners have struggled through unusual heat and humidity, leftover hurricane rain, sudden temperature dips and peaks and gardens which are suddenly re-blooming and refusing to follow their usual fall pattern. It's frustrating and it may be the new norm for the for-seeable future but New England gardeners long ago learned how to say goodbye to disappointments. In our heart of hearts we believe that next year will be better! We'll learn to adapt our gardening practices to the new norm and show Mother Nature that we can handle whatever she throws at us!

Now, without the heat and humidity, planting, dividing and general maintenance in the garden becomes a pleasure. Our ground stays warm until almost Thanksgiving and the temperature cool-down is gradual. Sunny days and cooler nights keep the dew on the grass well into the morning and make gardening a pleasure. Indian Summer traditionally only occurs when warm days come after a killing frost ... and that occurs anywhere from mid-October to mid-November. It's Mother Nature's last gift to us before we bed down for the winter.

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 without the urgency and pace of spring gardening and allows us the time to savor these last golden days and to take our time over the chores.

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 life? Perhaps you like the way the garden looks now ... plant more of it and have double the pleasure this time next year! 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.

Leaving your garden neat and tidy will pay huge dividends in the spring and give you a jump start on the next season. 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.

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

Upcoming Workshops

Acer Gardens will once again hold its annual Holiday Decorating Workshop concentrating on decorating containers and wreaths. Add to your wreath by choosing from our own decorations or feel free to bring your own treasured ornaments to use. 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 and an Email announcement will be sent out 2 weeks before so that you will have time to sign-up in advance and reserve your place. Last year's Workshops were filled with holiday spirit, good cheer, apple cider and home-made treats so don't miss out on this year's fun!

Acer Gardens at The CT Flower Show

Winters can be long in New England. Look ahead and think about planning a day trip to the CT Flower Show in Hartford. The annual CT Garden Show will take place from Thursday, February 20 through Sunday, February 23, 2020 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Covering almost three acres, the show features over 300 booths, landscaped gardens and 80 hours of seminars and demonstrations (which are free with your ticket.) Acer Gardens will once again have a large booth with expanded offerings ranging from the Aralia 'Sun King' (the 2020 Perennial Plant of the Year), colorful Coleus, herbs, Pussy Willow plants and decorative and unusual garden art. Come and visit and welcome Spring! Go to www.ctflowershow.com for further information, ticket availability and seminar listings.

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 : **Dendranthema (Perennial Chrysanthemum)**

Zone: 4-9 Height: 18-36" Spread: 2-3'

The true perennial mum, these beautiful, dependable flowers require almost no maintenance during the growing season. They burst into bloom in October, showcasing daisy-like flowers in many shades, especially pink and rose. Give them full sun, rich, well-drained soil, and lots of room. Deadhead to extend bloom time. Division every 2-3 years will control their tendency to spread. These lovely flowers combine well with Grasses, Asters and Sedums.

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.

Prune any deadwood from trees and shrubs to control storm damage.

Tie back long climbing rose canes to prevent wind whip.

Do your transplanting and moving in early October 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.

Leave ornamental grasses in place ... they will act as a bird refuge in the winter.

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

Do not compost leaves of Roses, Iris, Peonies or Phlox as they can carry disease.

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 outside at the same time you plant your annuals!

The bees will continue to pollinate late-blooming perennials: Anemones, Asters, Roses and Sedums are particular favorites.

Don't fertilize or prune roses --- wait until spring. Hill up 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.

Don't cut back these plants/bushes until spring:

Artemisia	Caryopteris	Lobelia
Asters	Dianthus	Montauk Daisies
Astilbe	Hellebore	Perovskia
Bergenia	Heuchera	Sedum
Buddleia	Lavender	Stachys
Campanula	Liatris	Tiarella

Edge the perennial beds so that the garden has a neat appearance going into the winter.

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

Amending Your Garden Soil

Fall is the ideal time to amend your garden soil. The first step is to have your soil tested. Go to www.soiltest.uconn.edu for complete instructions on the process. You will receive a report which will include both analysis and recommendations for improving your particular soil. Some gardeners test soil from different parts of the garden and act accordingly.

Soil is usually evaluated on two components: fertility and texture. Fertility delivers essential nutrients to plants; texture refers to the size and composition of the soil particles. The nutrients plants need the most are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

Nitrogen produces healthy leaf and stem growth but it does not stay in the soil very long and can be washed out by rains. Too much nitrogen in the soil will cause excessive foliage growth. Phosphorus is needed for root growth. Adding bone meal when planting bulbs in the fall helps in producing flowers next season. Potassium contributes to overall good plant health and is necessary for plants to flower and fruit. It is water soluble and needs to be replenished from time to time.

The ideal garden soil texture is a sandy loam which allows for air and water movement. Adding organic matter to soil encourages beneficial microbial activity and provides a nutritional benefit. An excellent source of beneficial organic matter is composted peat moss manure. How well your soil absorbs the organic matter will determine what supplemental feeding will be necessary to keep your plants happy.

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 and 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, Liriope, 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!

Berries in a fall garden bring their own burst of color. Adding color you see from the house is a good way to connect the indoors to the outdoors all season long. Consider planting purple Beauty Bush, Snowberry, Winterberry and Hollies.

Choose Your Own Foliage

Have you ever been envious of the colorful foliage you see as you drive around in the fall? So much of our New England foliage is borrowed from the general landscape. Fall is the perfect time to plant a tree with the color of foliage you like and place it in your landscape where it will show to its greatest advantage. Be sure you can see it from the house!

Some trees producing brilliant foliage and/or berries include:

Acer griseum (Paperbark maple)

30' Sun/partial shade Well-drained soil

This slow-growing, highly ornamental tree shows very red foliage well into the fall season. Exfoliating cinnamon bark peel provides winter interest.

Cornus kousa (Japanese dogwood)

20' Partial shade to sun Adaptable

A carefree, vase-shaped flowering tree, the kousa's white flowers bloom in May and June and are followed by bright red berries in late summer. Fall foliage ranges from scarlet to purple. This tree provides a safe haven for birds in the winter.

Malus (Crabapple)

15-25' Full sun Rich loam

Blooming in May, the crabapple produces fruit in summer. Autumn transforms both the fruit and foliage to deep colors ranging from purple to red to yellow. Winter snow accents the colors of the bark.

Stewartia pseudocamellia (Japanese stewartia)

25' Sun to shade Rich, well-drained soil

This slow grower produces white flowers in June and July with very showy red-orange fall foliage. Its peeling bark provides winter interest in tones of orange, green and gray. Give it some shelter from strong afternoon sun.

Helping Evergreens Get Ready for Winter

Evergreens need to be well-watered before the start of winter but they should not be 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 or containers. 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.

Changing to Fall 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 a Thanksgiving 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 or cover them with an old sheet. (Don't use plastic!) Put them back outside 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. Add a few boxwood cuttings to spike the foliage. Place the winter containers where they can be seen from the house as a way to connect the outside landscape to the inside.

Storing Tender Bulbs and Tubers

After a frost, cut off the leaves and dig up Dahlias, Gladioli, Cannas, Caladiums, Colocasia (Elephant Ears) and Acidanthera. Do not wait for these tubers/bulbs to freeze before you dig them up. Clean off the soil (do not wash) and store the roots on their side in vermiculite or the cedar shavings used at the bottom of gerbil cages. They do well stored in boxes in the basement, protected from temperature extremes and dampness. Label by type and color. If mice routinely get into your cellar, ask your supermarket produce manager for an empty fine-meshed red onion bag. Line the bag with several layers of newspaper, add the cedar chips and layer the bulbs/tubers in. Pull the bag closed, label by type and color, and hang high on a hook in the cellar.

Houseplants and Light

By the middle of October, 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. Spray with Neem or another horticultural oil before you bring them inside. Grouping plants together in the house 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 all winter long.

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.

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.

Grow lights are often helpful and some plants thrive when placed under ordinary house lamps even if most of that light comes in the evening! 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 begin to change.

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 a friend! A constant layer of snow cover provides moisture and helps insulate soil and roots against fluctuating temperatures. Gardeners, as well as skiers, hope for snow!

Healthy plants are more likely to survive winter unscathed. Start your winter protection routine in autumn. Don't prune after midsummer. Pruning can stimulate new, tender growth and can delay dormancy. 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.) If slugs were a problem this past summer, treat the soil now. 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.

Often-Asked Questions

I'd like to bring some sharp fall foliage into the back of the garden ... yellow and orange foliage or red that I can see from the house. Any suggestions?

Both American Beech and European Larch will bring you yellow foliage but it takes awhile to get them cooking. Try Vernal Witch Hazel ...6-10' tall, 8-12' wide at maturity ... and it will also give you small, yellow flowers in very early spring. For orange foliage, try Barberry, Staghorn sumac and any number of Sugar Maples. In fact, the range of foliage on Sugar Maples is extraordinary! Japanese Stewartia has incredibly showy red-orange fall foliage and Paperback maple could easily become the star of your garden.

I never know if I should mulch for the winter or not. I don't want to give protection to rodents and gnawers but the ground looks so bare!

In areas without reliable snow cover, such as south-eastern Connecticut, mulch can be very useful but it's a good idea to wait until the ground is frozen hard before applying it. You can use straw, or evergreen boughs, but avoid using leaves or grass clippings. The mulch should be removed after the first serious thaw (don't fall for that fake February thaw), whenever it comes.

What can I do to control all those "critters" running around and chewing everything in sight?

After last year's mild winter, the chipmunks, voles and moles have really been running amok! Now is the time to trap them as they do not hibernate and will continue to cause trouble all winter long. Don't make piles of sticks and twigs ... it's their favorite hiding place. Vole traps are available at the nursery and have proven effective.

Should I rake the leaves off the ground around rhododendrons and azaleas?

Many gardeners prefer not to rake leaves out of shade gardens. Fallen leaves act as a natural mulch for broad leaf evergreens such as Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Mountain Laurel and help prevent moisture loss during a dry winter. As the leaves break down they will enrich the soil and form a good base for spring mulch.

I love the look of little bulbs but I never know how close to each other I can plant them. Is there a rule-of-thumb?

Here's an easy table to refer to ... with the number of bulbs you can plant per square foot.

Chionodoxa	8 – 10	Greek windflower	10-15
Crocus	10-15	Hyacinth	4-6
Grape hyacinth	10-15	Siberian squill	9-12
Daffodils	4-5	Tulips	4-5

What can I do in the garden to get a head start on Spring? It all seems so overwhelming! Is there such a thing as a Bare Bones List?

Yes, there is a Bare Bones List: Cut down and remove the dead stuff, rake off the leaves, add compost and edge the beds. Just add in the extras that apply to your garden!

The ground is so much easier to work in the fall and everything will look sharp going through the winter if you edge the beds. Then, in the Spring, you'll have a head start and one thing will be crossed off your list!

Planting Garlic

Plant both hardneck and softneck 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.

The Vegetable Garden

If you didn't use all your herbs, you can dry them easily in the microwave. Arrange sprigs of thyme, oregano or rosemary in a single layer on a paper towel on a large paper plate. Cover with another paper towel and microwave on High for 1 ¼ minutes or until dry and brittle. Remove the leaves from the stems. Cool them and then crumble into small, labeled Ziploc bags. They can be stored for 1 year. Do not freeze.

Leave carrots, leeks, parsnips, radishes, beets, green peppers and turnips in the garden so that you can harvest them through the fall. 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. 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. Don't be discouraged! Last summer was a tough one for many vegetable growers, not just you, and next Spring we will all start fresh... and optimistic!

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. Many new varieties of vegetables have been developed recently to accommodate gardeners who grow vegetables in containers on the patio or deck. Small-sized vegetables currently available include bush cucumbers and patio tomatoes.

Holiday Flowers, Wreaths and Containers

Wreaths, containers, bows and mixed greens will be available at the nursery starting the week before Thanksgiving. We take individual orders and can help you design a tablescape to fit your holiday décor. If you have favorite holiday table containers bring them to the nursery and let staff help you fill them to make this holiday season really special! Gift certificates are available at the nursery as well as pre-planted paper-whites in containers and many amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted. Need an unusual present? Take a look at our pre-decorated bird-houses ... they make outstanding presents! Indoor containers can be designed and planted to fit with your other decorations. Just come and visit and give us a few days preparation time.

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. 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. If you give us a few days to work, we'll be happy to pot up amaryllis bulbs in your own containers or you can choose one of ours. We also have gift boxes of paperwhites and amaryllis bulbs. Allow 8-12 weeks from potting to bloom and start the amaryllis 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. (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.

The Bulbs are Here!

This year, Acer Gardens has many different kinds of bulbs available, with a greatly expanded selection. Tulips are here 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. Adding small bulbs to your established gardens is a quick way to enhance your spring plantings and a fun way to experiment with "new looks". Daffodils and Paper Whites for forcing and large-sized Amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted, will also be available.

Alliums

The key to growing terrific alliums (and giving flower beds a "WOW" factor) is choosing the right location! Alliums are happiest planted in soil that is well-draining with full sun. After planting, sprinkle on some Bulb Tone and give the bulbs a handful of the mixture in the summer when the blooms fade. Pinch the faded head off before it sets seed but leave the foliage and stem to feed the bulbs. They are slow to multiply but if you find you have a large clump of foliage but no flowers, lift, divide and reset. The nursery has stocked 7 Allium cultivars, both tall and short, including new red and white varieties as well as the familiar large purple flowers.

Hyacinths

Hyacinths are well-suited to container planting and make superb edging plants. Their strong colors and fragrance make a color splash along well-travelled walkways. Blooming in early to mid spring, Hyacinths are good companions for Daffodils and Tulips. Plant the bulbs 4- 6" deep in full to partial sun and protect with extra mulch during the winter months.

Some bulbs have proven to be resistant to vole damage. Try growing Alliums, Muscari, Daffodils, Scilla, Hyacinths and Hyacinthoides.

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.

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.

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.

We plant tulips and daffodils almost every year. Here's how to keep them really happy:

Daffodils:

Daffodils are a sure sign of spring and incredibly welcoming after a long, gray winter! Deer-resistant and rodent-proof, they earn their keep many times over. Water late-flowering daffodils in spring if the weather turns dry. Deadhead as needed but let the leaves yellow for at least 6 weeks before removing them. They need to store energy for next year's bloom. If you notice sparse bloom it may be time to lift the clump and divide. Once the Daffodils are finished for the season, dig in some bone-meal to ensure good growth for next spring. When cutting Daffodils for the house, don't mix them with other flowers ... their stems produce a fluid which makes other flowers wilt.

Tulips:

Generally the last of the spring bulbs to bloom, Tulips give bold masses of color. They look best when planted in large numbers so the more you plant, the better the show will be! Position them close to the house to give them protection from late storms and cold snaps. Tulips need several hours of direct sunlight in order to put on their best blooms. (They will, however, bloom under deciduous trees which don't have their leaf canopies yet.) Warm afternoon sun and exposure to wind can cut down the length of bloom time so try to avoid those conditions. Since they don't all bloom at the same time, careful selection can give you extended bloom time.

Rainy summers and wet soil are not good news for Tulips. When planting, fertilize. In the spring, as the leaves emerge, fertilize again and water well. Deadhead the Tulips but let the leaves yellow at least 6 weeks before removing. In this climate, tulips generally last about 3 years before needing replacing.

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 Christmas 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. Some people add 1 Tb. of vodka or plain gin to the paper-white water after the bulbs come out of their storage period. This helps keep the stems short and prevents toppling but will not interfere with bloom. Do not fertilize the bulbs.

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

For many of us, the first real sign of Spring is that magic carpet of flowering crocus flung across part of the lawn! You can replicate that look indoors. With a few days notice, the nursery will pot up some crocus for you to force. Choose one of our containers, select your bulbs and get ready for Spring!

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 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 hoses. Turn off all outside water faucets.

Winters can be long in New England. Look ahead and think about planning a day trip to the CT Flower Show in Hartford. The 39th annual CT Garden Show will take place from Thursday, February 20 through Sunday, February 23, 2020 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. There will be over 300 booths, landscaped gardens and 80 hours of seminars and demonstrations (which are free with your ticket.) Go to www.ctflowershow.com for further information, ticket availability and seminar listings. What a great way to get ready for spring!

General Reminder

Acer Gardens will close on 12/24 and, weather permitting, will re-open the last weekend of March 2020.

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor