



Department of Horticulture

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service West Lafayette, IN

Autumn Garden Calendar

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Timing horticultural events and practices can vary from year to year, depending on weather conditions. The following information is intended as a general guide. Regional differences are noted when practical. Adjust activities according to local weather and site conditions. Be sure to read label directions thoroughly on all products.

Indoor Plants and Activities

September

- Prepare storage areas for overwintering tender flower bulbs and garden produce.
- Thanksgiving (or Christmas) cactus can be forced into bloom in time for the holidays. Provide 15 hours of complete darkness each day, such as from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m., for approximately eight weeks. Keep temperature at about 60° to 65°F. Temperatures of 55°F will cause flower buds to set without the dark treatment.
- Dig and repot herbs or take cuttings for growing indoors over the winter.
- Store leftover garden seed in a cool, dry place. A sealable jar with a layer of silica gel or powdered milk in the bottom works well.
- Bring houseplants that were moved outside for the summer back indoors before night temperatures drop below 55°F. Gradually decrease the amount of light to acclimate the plants and help reduce leaf drop. Be sure to control insects and diseases before putting the plants near other houseplants.

- Reflower last year's poinsettias for this year's holiday by providing complete darkness for 15 hours daily beginning about October 1 until about December 10.

October

- Pot-up spring-flowering bulbs with tips exposed, to force into bloom indoors. Moisten soil and refrigerate 10 to 13 weeks. Transfer to a cool, sunny location, and allow an additional three to four weeks for blooming.
- Water indoor plants less frequently, and discontinue fertilizer as plants slow down or stop growing for the winter season.

November

- Move plants closer to windows or to sunnier exposures, such as west and south facing windows, if plants are dropping many leaves. Artificial lights may be needed to supplement particularly dark rooms.
- Continue dark treatment for poinsettias by keeping them in complete darkness from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. until early December, or until red bracts begin to show.

Woody Ornamental Landscape Plants and Tree Fruits

September

- Fall is a good time to plant many container-grown or balled-and-burlapped nursery stock. Prepare a good-sized hole, plant at the same depth it grew in the nursery, and water thoroughly. Mulching will help protect against large fluctuations in soil temperature and moisture. Be sure to stake or guy-wire tall plants to protect them from strong winds.

- Do not be alarmed if your evergreens, particularly white pine and arborvitae, drop some of their older needles. All evergreens shed needles at some time, but not all at once as deciduous plants do.
- Harvest apples when flavor is sweet but before fruits soften.
- Harvest pears when the dots on the skin begin to turn brown. Pears are best ripened to yellow off the tree.
- Clean up fallen fruits, twigs, and leaves around apple (including crabapple) and other fruit trees to reduce disease and insect carry-over.

October

- Keep plants, especially newly planted stock, well-watered until the ground freezes.
- Have soil ready for mounding roses for winter protection. Do not mound or cover the roses until after leaves drop and soil is near freezing, usually in late November or early December.

November

- Prevent rabbit and rodent feeding damage by erecting physical barriers, such as metal mesh (1/4") hardware cloth. Pull mulch away from the trunk a few inches because the mulch provides a warm winter home for rodents. Chemical repellents are also available, but their effectiveness is temporary and not fool proof.
- Prevent frost cracking (or sunscald) by wrapping trunks with commercial tree wrap or painting the south and southwest facing sides of the trunk with white latex outdoor paint. Young, thin-barked trees such as maples and many fruit trees are especially susceptible.
- Remove dead, diseased, or damaged branches.
- Protect the graft union on rose bushes by mounding soil up 12 inches around the plants and adding mulch on top. Wait until after several killing frosts have occurred so that plants will be dormant when covered. Plants covered too early may be smothered.

- If you are planning to order a "live" Christmas tree, prepare its planting hole before the soil freezes. Mulch the area heavily to prevent freezing, or dig the hole and put the fill in a protected, nonfreezing area, such as a garage or basement.

Lawns

September

- To promote the lawn's recovery from summer stress, apply high-nitrogen fertilizer at the rate of 1 pound actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- Mow lawn to maintain a 2 to 2 1/2-inch height, removing no more than 1/3 of the height of the grass at any one time.
- Leave clippings on the lawn or add them to the compost pile.
- Vertical thinning or power raking of the lawn will help control thatch build-up, if needed.
- Reseed bare spots or new lawns with a good quality seed mixture.
- Early fall is a good time to apply broadleaf weed killers. Be sure to follow all label directions, and choose a calm day to prevent spray drift.

October

- Rake the fallen leaves from lawn, particularly larger-sized leaves, such as maple and sycamore leaves; they can smother the lawn as they become wet and mat down. Raking of smaller leaves, such as honeylocust, is optional.

November

- Late fall fertilizing can help keep the lawn green longer and boost early spring recovery. Although top growth stops when air temperature drops to 45 to 50°F, roots remain active as long as soil temperatures remain above 35-40°F. Apply 1 pound actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn.

Flowers, Vegetables, and Small fruits

September

- Dig onions and garlic after tops falls over naturally and necks begin to dry.
- Dig potatoes with a fork or shovel and allow to air dry for a week or two and then store in a cool (40-45°F), dark location.
- Plant radishes, sets for green onions, lettuce, and spinach for fall harvest.
- Thin fall crops, such as lettuce and carrots, that were planted earlier.
- Harvest crops such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, melons, and sweet potatoes before frost, or cover plants with blankets, newspaper, etc. (but not plastic) to protect them from light frost.
- Harvest mature, green tomatoes before frost and ripen indoors. Individually wrap fruits in newspaper, or leave them on the vine, pulling the entire plant out of the garden. Store in a cool location, about 55 to 60°F.
- Harvest winter squash before hard frost. Skin of the squash should be tough with deep, solid color. Some cultivars will show an orange blush when mature.
- Plant, transplant, or divide peonies, daylilies, iris, and phlox.
- Save plants such as coleus, wax begonias, impatiens, or fuchsia for indoor growing over winter. Dig plants, and cut them back about halfway, or take cuttings of shoot tips, and root them in moist vermiculite, soil mix, or perlite.
- Watch for garden chrysanthemums to bloom as days grow shorter. Some may already have bloomed earlier in summer, which will decrease the number of fall blooms.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs beginning in late September. Planting too early can cause bulbs to sprout top growth before winter. However, allow at least four to six weeks before the ground freezes for good root formation.
- Cut flowers, such as strawflower, statice, baby's breath, and celosia for drying; hang upside down in a dry, well-ventilated area.
- Dig and store tender garden flowers for winter storage. Gladiolus corms should be dug when leaves begin turning yellow. Caladiums, geraniums, and tuberous begonias should be lifted before killing frost. Dig canna and dahlia roots after a heavy frost. Allow to air dry, then pack in dry peat moss or vermiculite, and store in a cool location.
- Harvest grapes, everbearing strawberries, and fall raspberries. For most fruits, flavor is the best indicator of ripeness, although color change can also be a good indicator. However, grapes change color long before they are fully flavored, so sample the fruit to be sure.
- Remove raspberry canes after they bear fruit.

October

- Harvest root crops and store in a cold (32°F), humid location. Storing produce in perforated plastic bags is a convenient and easy way to increase humidity.
- Harvest brussels sprouts as they develop in the axils of the leaves from the bottom of the stem. Brussels sprouts will continue to develop up the stem.
- Harvest pumpkins and winter squash when rind is hard and fully colored but before frost. Store in a cool location until ready to use.
- Harvest gourds when stems begin to brown and dry. Cure at 70 to 80°F for two to four weeks.
- Asparagus top growth should not be removed until foliage yellows. Let foliage stand over the winter to collect snow for insulation and moisture.
- Remove plant debris from the garden to protect next year's planting from insect and disease build-up. Compost plant refuse by alternating layers of soil, plant material, and manure or commercial fertilizer.

- Carve a Halloween jack-o'-lantern.
- Complete planting of spring-flowering bulbs.
- Strawberry plants need protection from winter's extremes, but applying winter mulch too early may cause crowns to rot. Wait until later in November.

November

- Have garden soil tested for fertilizer needs every three to five years.
- Fall tilling, except in erosion-prone areas, helps improve soil structure and usually leads to soils warming up and drying faster in the spring, thus allowing crops to be planted earlier.
- Apply winter mulch to strawberries when plants are dormant but before temperatures drop below 20°F, usually in late November or early December.

For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.
