Preparing Your Garden for Winter

Yes, colder weather is just around the corner. And before winter arrives, it's time to clean up the yard and mulch around plants.

First the clean up. Remove all spent annuals and, if they are pest and disease free, throw them into the compost pile. Do not put diseased annuals or any dead or diseased foliage that you trim from perennials and woody plants into your compost as those diseases could carry over to another year. Rather, discard those items in your yard waste. This is also true for old mulch that has been beneath a diseased plant. And, speaking of mulch . . .

Once the clean up is complete, and cold weather has arrived, it's time to mulch perennials and shrubs. Pine needles and chopped leaves are a great choice: they are certainly plentiful and chopped leaves are particularly good since they return nutrients to the soil. Wood-chip mulch can also be used and it is readily available by the bag at all local garden centers. If you need more than a few bags of mulch and have access to a pickup truck, mulch can be bought by the truck load at T.H. Blue, Inc., in Eagle Springs.

A simple compost pile

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Don't forget your trees and lawn. Wrap the lower trunks of young trees with wire screening or a tree-guard product to protect the tender bark from chewing animals. And when it comes to warm-season grass, keep in mind that no fertilizer is needed late in the season and that much less water is required. For specific information on how to care for each of the different types of grass used in our area, visit the NC State University website at www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/Maintenance_Calendars.aspx

Finally, here are a few tips for those of you who were lucky enough to have an herb garden this last season. There is no need to fertilize after early August as that will only make your herbs more susceptible to cold-weather damage. Continue to harvest your perennial herbs, but do so with a light hand after mid-September as that too will make them less winter hardy.

The first freeze date for our area is around October 24, so before that time you may want to take cuttings of annual herbs, such as basil, to grow inside. You can root them in water and then transplant into pots with good potting soil. A good sunny spot should not only keep them going but also reward you with fresh herbs during the winter season.

Back in the garden, mulch your perennial herbs after the first-freeze with a 2- to 3-inch layer of organic material. This will keep the soil temperature uniform and help protect the plant’s roots. Most of this mulch should be removed in the spring when you see new growth. Then as winter progresses, keep an eye on your evergreen herbs and if precipitation is scarce, be sure to give them a little supplemental water if needed.

As its name would suggest, the Asian lady beetle is a native of Asia. But thanks to the U.S. Department of Agriculture it's been in this country since 1916. It was also reintroduced here in the mid-60s to control pecan aphids.

True to their nature, the beetles devour pecan aphids, but they also feed on other soft-bodied insects found in trees, row crops and gardens. For the most part, they are considered beneficial. But try telling that to homeowners who suddenly find themselves dealing with an uninvited house guest... give or take a few hundred!

Usually beginning in September, the beetles congregate in mass numbers on west- and south-facing walls of buildings. They also find their way indoors as they search for a warm place to overwinter. Though they can be a bit of a nuisance, they do not cause any harm to the structures in which they reside. The best way to keep these unwanted guests from sharing your house is to make sure all entry doors have tight-fitting door sweeps. Also, seal any gaps in siding, pipes, windows, or other places where the beetles can enter. Not only will this lessen the likelihood of a beetle invasion, but as an added bonus it will make your home more energy efficient in time for colder weather!

For more information, visit www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Other/goodpest/note107.html.
It doesn’t seem to make any sense. The preceding pages gave directions for putting your garden to bed for the winter. And, this article is all about planting second crops and cool-weather plants in the heat of summer and now, in the fall. To show just how easy it is to get a second crop of some of your favorite summer vegetables, Taylor Williams, Moore County Extension Agent, and Linda Hamwi, Master Gardener Volunteer, held a planting demonstration on July 21 at the square-foot demonstration gardens outside the County Agriculture Building in Carthage. (See photo below.)

Despite temperatures close to 100 degrees, they put in a second crop of bush beans, arugula, cucumbers and summer squash. Cool-season vegetables such as sweet peas, spinach, broccoli and Swiss chard were also planted. Even a few drought-tolerant flowers found their way into the gardens just to brighten things up a bit.

The hot days of late summer may seem like a strange time to be planting, but according to Williams, the hot weather and warm soil temperatures are ideal since they increase a plant’s growth rate. Seedlings that grow slowly in spring, will sprint in summer. The same goes for seed germination. And then, come fall, the plants have matured enough to produce a plentiful harvest.

It may now be too late in the season to plant those summer crops mentioned above, but it’s not too late to plant some cool-season vegetables. According to Master Gardener Volunteer Bruce Fensley, there’s still time, even in September, to plant carrots, radishes, leaf lettuce and parsley.

So it does make sense after all. Fall is the time to put most of your garden to bed—just not quite all of it. Keep a little space available for those cool-weather vegetables and flowers.

For more information on planting a fall garden, including what to plant and when, check out [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8001](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8001). Additional information on the benefits of using the principles of square-foot gardening for those fall crops, go to [www.locavorenetwork.com/content/square-foot-gardening](http://www.locavorenetwork.com/content/square-foot-gardening).
Asters have long been a favorite autumn native. And, it’s easy to see why: from August into November their colorful clouds of daisy-like flowers do wonders to dress up the waning summer garden.

For light shade areas, you can try the native blue wood aster, *Symphyotrichum cordifolium*. Its ¾-inch blooms not only brighten the garden, but they make beautiful cut flowers. For full sun, try the New York aster, *Symphyotrichum novi-belgii*, which, in spite of its name, is also a N.C. native. When grown in moist soil, these 2-5 foot tall plants sport flowers with pale blue or violet rays surrounding yellow centers. Native asters do a lot more than just extend garden color: their nectar is a great attraction for butterflies. Native flowers are just one more way we can help preserve the biodiversity of our Sandhills.

Sources for these and other native plants, can be found through an internet search such as "native plant suppliers, nc" or at Big Bloomers Flower Farm, Sanford, NC, and Niche Gardens, Chapel Hill, NC.

**Plant of the Month:** 

**Aster**

Oct.  Wait until the third week to plant pansies. Put 0-0-22 (potash-Sul-po-mag) onto lawns, shrubbery, flower and vegetable gardens to promote the growth of root systems.

Nov.  Plant trees and shrubs. Plant spring bulbs with bone meal in the bottom of the hole.

Dec.  Take a soil sample to the Extension Office. Lime grass and flower beds as suggested by the soil sample results.

Jan.  Cut back summer-blooming shrubs such as chaste tree, crape myrtles, and butterfly bush. Do not prune crape myrtle branches thicker than your little finger. Treat cool-season weeds (post-emergents) in lawns and rake up and mulch fallen leaves.

Feb.  Plant trees and shrubs and prune all existing trees and shrubs except maples and spring flowering plants.

Mar.  Apply pre-emergents to warm-season grass lawns and flower beds to suppress warm-season weeds. Fertilize crape myrtles and other blooming trees with super phosphate or bone meal. Check soil sample report for guidance. Don’t be tempted to plant before the projected "last-frost" date--approximately April 15 in this area.

Don’t miss our next edition in the spring of 2012.

Additional copies of *Dig This* can be found at http://moore.ces.ncsu.edu/index.php?page=lawngarden
Scroll down to Newsletters

For more information on any of the topics covered herein, contact the MGV Information Hot Line: 910-947-3188

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