

# Fall is a good time to prepare and plant for the next year

The official start of autumn is just around the corner, but for most of us, back to school heralds the start of the fall season.

Because spring is the time of new growth, it has always been considered the planting season. Many gardeners look at fall as the end of the growing season, and may think it is too late to plant.

I am here to tell you that fall is an excellent time to plant most trees, shrubs and perennials. What are some of the benefits of fall planting? The first is increased root growth. As a plant starts to slow its production of leaves and flowers and harden off in preparation for dormancy, more energy can be focused on root development.

The still warm soil and cooler air temperatures encourage strong root growth. Roots continue to grow as long as the soil temperature stays above 50 degrees. So while it may look like nothing is happening above ground, fall planted perennials, shrubs and trees are getting a jump start on root development and will start the spring season ahead of the game.

When summer arrives, they will be better equipped to deal with the heat and drought, largely due to their well-established root systems. Another benefit to fall planting is that the plants require less water. As the days get shorter and cooler, plants are using less water and will only need to be watered every 7-10 days, unless it is unusually hot and dry.

There are also fewer pest and disease problems this time of year. Hardy bulbs like daffodils and tulips not only like being planted in the fall, they need to be planted in the fall. Bulbs require a cooling period in order to bloom in the spring. Planting them in the fall gives them time to root in and become established before the ground freezes.

Fall planting is not only good for the plants; it also has benefits for the gardener. It is more enjoyable working outdoors in the cooler temperatures of fall than under the hot summer sun. Gardeners usually have too much to do in the spring and fall planting allows us to spread out the work load.

Speaking of work load, there are some important fall clean up tasks to get started on. If you have summered your houseplants outside, now is a good time to prepare them for the move indoors. I like to use a systemic insecticide about a week or two before moving them in to make sure there are no unwanted hitchhikers along for the ride. You could use a light-weight horticultural oil spray to prevent any eggs from hatching indoors.

It is best to move plants in gradually, maybe to an unheated porch first to allow them time to adjust to the warmer, drier, darker conditions in the house. They may drop leaves as they become acclimated to the increasingly dry air.

Fall is a good time to divide most perennials particularly spring and early summer bloomers like bleeding heart and daylilies. Peonies must be divided in the fall. As long as plants are blooming, continue to deadhead. In general, do not fertilize now. Plants need to start slowing down their growth and hardening off. Fertilizing now will encourage new growth that could be damaged by an early frost or freeze.

If you have a pond, stop fertilizing your plants. Continue feeding your fish until the water temperature drops to 50 degrees. Pond netting may be used to keep falling leaves out of the water. Leaves left in the pond will decompose and create unwanted waste. Use a product like Microbe-Lift Autumn Prep to reduce



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Local columnist

sludge build-up. Remove your pump from the pond and store in a bucket of water to keep the seals from drying out over the winter.

If you are going to fish in the pond over the winter, you will need to keep a small area free of ice so toxic gases can escape. The easiest way to accomplish this is with a pond heater or deicer and/or an aerator.

One final thought on fall projects...several weeks ago, a customer came in to attend one of our Saturday classes. She had her garden journal with her and shared it with me and a coworker. It was so well-done and interesting. She has documented the establishment and growth of her gardens from the time she and her husband bought their house five years ago until now. What fun looking at before-and-after pictures.

Starting a garden journal is such a great idea for all of us. Use it to record successes and failures, dreams, ideas and happy coincidences. It doesn't have to be fancy — even a spiral notebook will do. I have to admit it is something I preach but haven't done myself yet. But Deb's journal was so inspiring, I am determined to start one. I hope you will too!

If you have questions or comments, e-mail Pine Hill Nursery owner Jeanine Rubert at: [jrubert@pinehill-nursery.com](mailto:jrubert@pinehill-nursery.com)

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