

November 2020

Fall is not the time to prune woody plants. Wait until late winter or early spring. If Rhododendrons, Forsythia, Azaleas, Lilacs and other spring flowering plants are pruned now, the flower buds for next year will be cut off. Prune these shrubs after flowering next spring.

Clean out and remove debris and dead plants from vegetable gardens and herbaceous borders. Insect and disease pests often over-winter in plant debris. Don't mulch roses and herbaceous perennials for winter protection until the ground freezes to at least a ¼ inch depth. The purpose of mulching is to keep the soil temperature as uniform as possible to help prevent freezing and thawing. A 3 or 4 inch layer of mulch is all that's need. Pine needles, pine boughs, straw, salt marsh hay or shredded oak leaves can be used. Avoid the use of hay which may contain seeds.

Safeguard roses against winter injury. Place garden soil around the base of each rose plant. This will protect the vulnerable bud union. Do not scrape up soil from around the plant base, but bring in soil from another area of the garden.

Don't bag those leaves! Rake them, chop them (run over them with a lawn mower) and return the chopped leaves as a mulch around trees and shrubs. You are recycling valuable plant nutrients and improving the structure of the soil. By placing leaf mulch around trees and shrubs, there should be no need, in most cases, to apply fertilizers to those plants. Leaves are an especially good source of potassium. Also, research has shown that directly mulching leaves into turf does not negatively affect the lawn.

October 2020

When night temperatures drop into the 40's move houseplants indoors. Watch the weather forecasts for frost warnings. Bring houseplants indoors now.

Cover tender plants with bed sheets or paper bags. Low areas are especially vulnerable.

You can pot up attractive foliage annuals such as ornamental sweet potato vine and coleus to bring indoors as winter houseplants. Prune back if they are too large. Take cuttings in the spring.

Rosemary can be dug up and potted now and brought indoors. Put pebbles in the bottom of the pot for good drainage and keep the soil slightly damp. If soil is allowed to dry out indoors, it will die. Put it in a cool, sunny location.

Water indoor plants less frequently and discontinue fertilizer as plants slow down or stop growing for the winter. If plants are dropping many leaves, move houseplants closer to windows with west and south facing exposures. Supplemental artificial lights may be needed.

Force Thanksgiving or Christmas cactus into bloom in time for the holidays. Provide 15 hours of complete darkness each day, such as from 5PM to 8AM for approximately eight weeks. Keep temperature at about 60-65 degrees. Temperature of 55 degrees will cause the flower buds to set without the dark treatment.

Continue to plant your spring bulbs now through early November. However, allow at least four to six weeks before the ground freezes for good root formation. Avoid planting tulips and crocuses since they are favorite bulbs of our very large population of chipmunks and squirrels. Instead plant daffodils, snowdrops, and leucojum bulbs.

Lengthen the flowering period by “double decking” that involves planting one layer of bulbs over another. First plant large bulbs, such as daffodils, hyacinths or alliums to a depth 2 to 4 times the height of the bulb. Cover these with a layer of soil, then plant the smaller and earlier blooming bulbs of scilla or grape hyacinth. Some of these early bloomers can be planted over late developing perennials.

Dig and store tender garden flowers for winter storage. Dig gladiolus corms when leaves begin turning yellow. Lift caladiums, geraniums, and tuberous begonias before a 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.

Apply limestone to soil where clematis, lavender, delphiniums, gypsophila, lilacs and dianthus are growing. These plants require a higher pH. Apply limestone at a rate of 5-10 pounds per 100 square feet every 2 or 3 years unless you have other recommendations based on a soil test. When making a new planting, it would be a good idea to group together those plants that have similar lime requirements.

August 2020

Finish pruning spring blooming shrubs and trees.

Cut out spent flower stalks of daylilies and remove yellow foliage.

Mower blades are often dull by late summer. Shredded foliage is an indication that it is time for a touch up sharpening to keep your mower running smoothly and for maintaining a healthy turf.

Continue to mow lawn at a height of 2 1/2-3 inches. Mowing too short during hot weather may be detrimental to turf grass.

The last week of August and the first two weeks of September are the best times to start a lawn. Soil is much warmer now than in the spring and grass seed will sprout faster and more evenly. Also, grass planted in late summer has twice as much time to establish itself before freezing weather turns it dormant.

If you are planning to renovate your lawn, particularly if it is subject to a lot of activity, select a grass seed mixture containing a good proportion of perennial ryegrass. New ryegrass varieties

are not only attractive in lawns, they are quick to establish and have excellent wear tolerance when compared to bluegrass and fescue varieties.

Be on the lookout for wasp and hornet activity and nests. Wasps and hornets are can be plentiful and aggressive at this time of the year.

Dig and divide bearded iris now. When planting, select only the best rhizomes. Cut away and discard any portion of the rhizome that is not in peak condition. Work compost into the soil before planting. Plant the rhizomes about 10 inches apart and with the top part of the rhizome exposed above ground level. Iris will grow best in at least 6 hours of sun.

Begin planning for fall bulb planting of spring flowering bulbs. The minor bulbs, are among the first plants to bloom after our long winters.

Begin grooming houseplants that have been outdoors. Repot the plants that are pot-bound, cut back leggy shoots, and debug plants with sprays of insecticidal soap.

Read the label as some plants are sensitive to insecticidal soap.

July 2020

Keep weeding your gardens as the weeds continue to develop. Many are making seeds for next year's garden.

Hold off on transplanting and dividing plants until cooler weather.

As you work in the garden on hot days, follow the shade around your property.

Continue watering containers and especially anything newly planted.

Check the plants twice weekly and water if they appear wilted or if the soil is dry. Use of a watering wand is helpful to thoroughly wet the entire area surrounding the plant. Avoid wetting foliage of plants such as phlox, peony and rose in order to prevent spread of fungal diseases.

With the water ban in many towns restricting watering, consider daylilies to add color to your garden. Daylilies are a drought resistant plant with thick fibrous roots that can store water for long periods.

- Prune spring blooming shrubs like azaleas, rhododendrons, lilacs, winterberries, viburnums, weigelas, hollies or boxwoods in this month before flower buds begin to form for next year.
- Using hand held pruners, remove deadwood , broken branches, rubbing and crossing branches opening up the shrub to more light and air circulation.
- Pruning also helps control the size of shrubs.
- Stand back looking at the shrub to determine which other branches should be cut back or removed to give the shrub a naturalistic look.

- When cutting back a branch, cut it to the juncture of the next branch don't leave stubs.
- Just removing the tips of branches will create a bushy shrub but will not open it up to air circulation that reduces the incidence of disease and pest problems.
- Other pruning tools are helpful such as loppers or a pruning saw for thicker branches.

Wear sunscreen and tick repellent when you are outdoors, avoid the edge areas where ticks tend to congregate.

June 2020

Finish planting by the end of this month so that plants can begin to establish themselves before the hottest weather arrives.

Do not drive or park on the lawn. Soil compaction by heavy equipment or foot traffic in the plant's root zone reduces the pore space for air in the soil. Also, percolation of moisture through the soil is disrupted so that the desirable air/moisture balance is not maintained. Roots die from a lack of oxygen.

Mulch landscape plants with organic mulches which provide many benefits, including moisture retention, control of fluctuations in soil temperature, weed suppression, and protection from mechanical damage from line trimmers and lawn mowers. Organic mulches such as bark mulch also look attractive and help with the addition of organic matter to the soil through decomposition. Remove established perennial weeds before mulch is applied. Avoid mulch depths greater than 4 inches and do not allow mulch to contact the base of trees and shrubs

Pinch fall asters and chrysanthemums to produce bushy plants with many flowers until the beginning of July. Stake tall plants before they fall over.

Most plants (lawns, vegetables, perennials, annuals, trees and shrubs) need one inch of water per week. It is better to water with one or two deep waterings per week than to water lightly each day which encourages shallow rooting. This means typically amounts of 6" deep for lawns, 8" for gardens, and 10" for trees and shrubs. Digging down into the soil is the best way to determine if enough water is received. Install a rain gauge to monitor the amount of water the plants receive.

Remove faded flower heads from rhododendrons which are now forming seeds. Be careful as new shoots are found on either side of the old flower heads.

Wait for bright green new growth to harden off before pruning evergreens in July and August.

June is a good month to move your houseplants outside. Many houseplants prefer dappled shade or protection from midday and early afternoon sun. This is a good time to repot them into a larger, clean pot using a soilless growing media.

Ticks are active and it is important to protect yourself with a repellent when working outdoors. Check yourself every day after working outdoors for ticks.

April 2020

Spring is a lovely time but it is also a time of much garden work which has begun early this year. Watch those backs and knees!

- We have had quite bit of rain this spring. Therefore, keep off the grass when the soil is wet to prevent compaction that reduces the spaces available for oxygen, making it difficult for grass roots to grow. This will have negative consequences for lawn when the weather gets hot and dry. Grass plants with reduced root systems struggle for survival under such stress.
- Be sure the lawn is dry before raking to remove branches, stones and other debris. Fertilize only if a late fall application was not made.
- Sharpen mower blades. Grass blades that are cut with a sharp edge are less likely to become diseases.
- Do not work your soil when it is wet. Tilling or digging when the soil is wet will cause it to dry into hard clods. (Use the squeeze test. Take a handful of soil and squeeze it. If the soil crumbles easily when you open your hand, it is ready to be dug but if water comes out, it is not ready.)
- Begin to edge beds and prepare for mulching. Check the depth of landscape mulches. Replenish before annual weeds begin to germinate. Mulches should be 2 to 4 inches deep, but not in contact with plants. Best to do it before plants emerge.
- Begin removing winter mulches from perennial borders and from the base of rose bushes when leafy buds on the plants begin to expand. At that time, pruning should begin. Cut out dead canes, cut back remaining stems of hybrid tea and floribunda roses to about 18 inches. Hedge or shrub roses and climbers need little pruning except to shape the plants and to remove dead portions of the canes.
- Prune summer and fall flowering shrubs now. Another sign that pruning time is at hand is the appearance of forsythia flowers. *With spring flowering species, wait until they have completed blooming.*
- Prune: butterfly bush, smoke tree, Hydrangea 'Annabelle' and beauty berry, panicle Hydrangea, Clethra (summersweet), Itea (sweetspire) and Spirea. *Hydrangeas that bloom on last year's old wood should be pruned after flowering with only dead stems removed at this time.*
- Shear back all ornamental grass and carex. Remove old Hellebore leaves, trim Epimedium and last year's fern fronds.
- Cut back any vinca or ivy browned by harsh winter winds, but leave browned rhododendron alone for now and prune after blooming,
- Prune climbing hydrangea and train to its vertical support.
- Protect irises from iris borer by raking away old foliage and disposing of it. Iris borer overwinters in the egg stage in old foliage.
- Trees and shrubs that were hosts to aphids, scale insects or spider mites last year should be treated with horticulture oil. Read the label.

SO MUCH TO DO AND SO LITTLE TIME

March 5, 2019

Have you checked your indoor plants recently?

Insect pests reduce the growth, vigor and appearance of the plant. Look at the tip of the plant first. Insects love to feed on new growth that will be easier to spot. Look to see if there a twist or misshapen leaves.

Aphids, sap-sucking insects, are the most common problem and their coloring will be the same as the plant. Shoot tips and flower buds are the preferred sites. They may be clustered at the tip especially on flowering plants like hibiscus and gardenias. Check the area below the plant for sticky honeydew.

Look for small bumps on the stem which is an indicator of scale insects. They are small, brown disks that attach to the underside of leaves, especially along the veins. These immobile adults are protected by their outer waxy shells, but can be wiped off with a damp cloth or a cue tip.

Spider mites are minute, sap-sucking pests which can infest the underside of leaves of nearly all house plants growing in hot and dry conditions. Upper surfaces become speckled with yellow blotches and the leaves fall prematurely. White webs are sometimes produced between the leaves and stems. Daily misting will help prevent attacks. If you see webbing on the top of the plant you have spider mites. This is a difficult insect to control and can spread to other plants in close proximity. Quarantine the problematic plant. Wash the plant with warm soapy water and soft cloth to remove webbing to and as many adults as possible.

Tap your plant to see if small white flies, small moth-like insects, fly from the underside of the foliage. Adult flies are unsightly; greenish larvae on the underside of the leaves suck sap and deposit sticky honeydew. Badly infested leaves turn yellow and drop. Whitefly can occur in great numbers and rapidly spread from plant to plant. Eradication is difficult. If the day is nice, take the plant outside or in the garage briefly and try to knock off as many of the flying insects as possible. Anything that comes off will die from the cold and will not be able to continue to lay eggs on your other plants.

If pieces of cotton are visible on the leaves or stems of the plant, you have a mealy bug problem. The cottony substance covers the insect. Large clusters can occur on the stems and under leaves of a wide variety of plants. A serious attack leads to wilting, yellowing, and leaf fall. Wipe off with a damp cloth or a cue tip. Look under the leaves and wash off as many as possible with a soft, wet, and soapy cloth.

Another problematic insect is the fungus gnat which looks like a small fruit fly. They are harmless but they lay eggs on the compost in the soil and the tiny, black-headed maggots produced can be harmful. The maggots normally feed on the organic matter in the compost but they will occasionally devour young roots. Fungus gnats can be troublesome in overly damp conditions. After washing your infected plant, consider using an oil spray that plugs the insect's pores and suffocates them. Be sure to get the underside and stems of the plant. Spray the top of the leaves last and repeat the spray in seven days. . Check your garden center for an insect spray that can be used indoors.

