

ACTON GARDEN CLUB

HORTICULTURE HINTS

October 2024

it's advisable to get as much cleanup done in the fall when the soils are drier. Cut down plants that no longer are useful in the garden.

Joann Vieira indicates that "some plants add beauty and are useful to insects and other wildlife such as: black-eyed Susan's (*Rudbeckia* sp.), gayfeather (*Liatris* sp), Sedum, *Astilbe*, coneflowers (*Echinacea* sp.), ornamental grasses like feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster'), fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln'), maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus'), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), baneberry (*Actaea rubra* and *A. pachypoda*), and culver's root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*). Some of these plants, laden with seeds, are like little above ground birdfeeders held on slender pedestals above the snow, when all else is covered. Others provide the perfect stem for insects-like preying-mantis, spiders, and bees to lay their eggs in or on, or for which moth and butterflies to attach their cocoons." **

"If you have issues with mice and/or voles. Cut masses of foliage back and leave no hiding places for these critters. Voles are mostly subterranean and love to hide in leaf litter. They will decimate the roots of plants by feeding on them, and will also strip the bark above ground. If they are a known problem, cut foliage back thoroughly and clear fallen leaves from beds and borders." **

When night temperatures drop into the 40's, move houseplants indoors. Watch the weather forecasts for frost warnings. Low areas are especially vulnerable. Cover tender plants with bed sheets or paper bags. Don't use plastic because it traps moisture under the cover which can freeze and damage the plants. If you do use plastic instead of cloth or newspaper, support it so it doesn't touch the plants. The best time of the day to start covering plants for frost is after the sun is off the garden, or right before sunset. Remove after the threat of frost is gone.

Fall is a good time to divide and move perennials such as: daylilies, bearded iris, peonies, hostas and garden phlox. Best to do this several weeks before the first hard frost. (At this writing, it's difficult to know when a frost will occur.)

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 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, it is best to 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.

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, airy location space. Most unfinished basements work well.

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.

If needed, the best time to apply lime is in the fall. Lime will have enough time to adjust the soil pH by next spring. To get the correct recommendations about lime and plant nutrients, get a soil test. Soil testing information is available at UMass Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Lab. Go to their website.

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*** Joann Vieira, Director of Horticulture, The Trustees of Reservations, UMass Extension's Hort Notes: Clippings from the Garden-Oct 1, 2019*