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During fall, some believe the mowing height of lawns should be lowered, and others believe it should be raised. The best mowing practice to follow is to mow at the same height from early spring to late fall. I'm not sure about the reasoning for lowering mowing height. The thinking on raising the height seems to be that extra foliage will insulate plant crowns from extreme cold. A taller height is unlikely to increase winter hardiness but could lead to turfgrass laying over and matting down during winter, which increases the risk of snow mold disease. The best mowing practice is to mow at the same height all season. For Kentucky bluegrass, mow at 2 to 3 inches and for tall fescue, mow at 2.5 to 3.5 inches. On fall mowing, the most beneficial thing to do is to continue to mow often enough to prevent removing more than one-third of the grass blade at any one mowing, and continue to mow until the grass stops growing.

When digging in gardens or lawns at this time of year, it's not unusual to find white grubs. In most cases, grubs can be ignored at this time of year. Attempting control will not prevent lawn damage next season; and in many cases, damage won't occur next season even if we see a lot of white grubs now. Damage that might happen at this time of year is from raccoons or skunks digging in lawns to eat juicy white grubs. Raccoons tend to be more destructive as they tear up and roll back sod in search of grubs and other insects. The best way to deal with damage to a lawn from raccoons or skunks foraging for white grubs and other insects is to put the sod back in place as best you can, then water the area to help it recover. If overseeding is needed, we are past the best time to seed as the risk of seedlings being killed by a freeze or winter cold is now high. Wait until spring to overseed bare areas or consider dormant seeding this winter.

Garlic needs to be planted in fall or early spring because dormant cloves and young plants must be exposed to temperatures of 32 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit for one to two months to induce bulb formation. Early to mid-October is the time to fall plant garlic in Nebraska. Garlic is started by planting small cloves or divisions of the bulb. The larger the clove planted, the larger the mature bulb will be at harvest. Do not purchase bulbs at a grocery store for garden planting. Select healthy bulbs from a garden center. Be sure to wait until just before planting to divide the bulb into cloves. If divided more than a few days before planting, yields will be reduced. Plant garlic cloves one to two inches deep and three to five inches apart into fertile soil high in organic matter. Keep the soil moist until it freezes and then mulch the area with straw or coarse leaves to prevent the soil from thawing and freezing over winter.

Fall is a good time for taking soil samples in lawns, gardens or landscapes. A basic soil test measures the pH of soil, organic matter content and the levels of some major elements needed for plant growth, such as phosphorous and potassium. If you have never had a soil test done, it is good to take one to use as a baseline for your garden or landscape. Information a basic soil test will not provide is if there is "something" in the soil that may be preventing a plant from growing as well, or yielding as high, as the grower might like. In other words, basic soil tests provide a baseline that will help with managing soil and plants; such as the need to increase organic matter content, select plants that tolerate alkaline or high pH soils, or to know to select a fertilizer that does not contain phosphorous. If you are interested in having a soil test done, the Extension office can provide a list of private labs in Nebraska to use for soil testing.

Rose growers should wait until next spring to prune roses in mid-to late April. The reason to wait is that many roses, even hardy ones, sustain winter injury during winter and the tips of stems and branches are damaged. These damaged ends need to be removed for plant health and appearance. If roses are pruned during fall or winter, they still sustain winter injury and the rose would need to be pruned again in April. This increases work for the gardener, and the rose may need to be pruned shorter than desired. On tender or less hardy roses, waiting until mid-to late April to prune has been shown to decrease the amount of winter injury on plants. Rose pruning is one task best left until spring. It is okay to prune most other shrubs, but wait until after they have dropped leaves and are dormant. If it is an early spring blooming shrub, wait until after blooming next spring to prune or flower buds will be removed.