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As cold weather approaches, it's time to dig and store plants that will not survive winter. The corms, tubers and rhizomes, often referred to as bulbs, of gladiolus, tuberous begonia, caladium and dahlia need to be dug and stored for replanting next year. All need to be dug soon after a light frost has browned the foliage. Freezing temperatures are best avoided. Remove the foliage and dry them for one week in a shady, well-ventilated site such as a garage or tool shed. Remove excess soil and pack them in peat moss, vermiculite, or perlite so they do not touch; or if one decays, the rot will spread. Dusting bulbs with fungicide before storage can help prevent rotting. Store Caladium between 50 and 60 degrees F. Glads, Dahlia and tuberous begonias are best stored near 40 degrees F. Some gardeners place them against a basement wall farthest from the furnace and insulate them so the wall keeps them cool. (Source. Ward Upham, K-State)

I was recently asked if late October would be too late to plant shrubs. Plants growing in containers with developed roots should be fine to plant through October and even into November, especially woody plants like trees and shrubs. Perennial flowers would be a higher risk. I would not plant an evergreen tree or shrub this late in the season as the risk of winter injury to evergreen foliage would be fairly high. If shade trees or shrubs are planted later in fall, keeping the soil moist up until it freezes is always important to encourage root growth well into fall. Placing a two to four-inch layer of wood chipped or shredded mulch over the soil of newly planted plants is beneficial. Mulch helps conserve soil moisture but also protects plants from fluctuating soil temperatures. Plants with less established roots can be heaved up out of soil if it freezes and thaws over winter. Be sure the mulch is not mounded up around plant stems.

It is recommended that Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue lawns be seeded in early September with mid-September being the latest for tall fescue and late September the latest for Kentucky bluegrass. While seeding turfgrass later than this can be successful, the odds of success diminish the later seed is planted. The issue with late plantings is not that the seed will not germinate and grow, or even that young grass plants are too sensitive to cold. Most often, the problem with planting turfgrass seed later in fall is with rooting. Unless young grass plants have a fairly extensive root system, the freezing and thawing of soil that takes place during winter can heave plants out of the ground where they dry out and die. Regardless of when planted, be sure the new lawn is kept watered through fall. More mature lawns will need less frequent watering but all should go into the winter with moist soil. Source: Ward Upham, K State)

By this time of year, many automatic irrigation systems have been drained for winter. Yet we continue to recommend watering of trees, shrubs and other landscape plants well into fall. As long as the soil is dry, air temperatures are above 40 degrees F., and soil is not frozen, watering to deeply moisten soil is beneficial; especially given the drought we are experiencing. Once irrigation systems are drained, it is best to use a hose or soaker hose and not an in-ground system to water. To determine if the soil is dry, insert a screwdriver or other probe into soil. If it is difficult to push into the soil and dry when removed, watering is needed. This test helps avoid overwatering plants which is harmful to plant roots and a waste of water. If needed, water long enough to moisten the soil to a depth of about 8 inches. After watering, be sure to remove hoses from the spigot, and drain them, to protect from freezing.

If plant material in a compost pile does not seem to be breaking down, the materials are probably too dry.

Microorganisms in a compost pile need nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, oxygen and water to do the decomposing job that transforms plant waste into compost. Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are supplied through the plant materials added to the pile. However, moisture and oxygen need to be tended to. Moistening plant waste prior to, or while adding it to a compost pile; then add water each time the pile is turned. A compost pile should be kept moist but not soggy. It should feel like a squeezed out sponge and only release a drop or two of water when a handful of materials are squeezed.

Microorganisms also need a good oxygen supply to keep doing their job. Turn compost piles weekly or at least every two or three weeks to help maintain a good oxygen supply and ensure faster decomposition.