

Today marks the end of daylight savings time for 2015. Exactly at 2:00 a.m., tomorrow morning, November 1, 2015, daylight savings time ends for another year. Tomorrow, we fall back to standard time. Falling back equates to it being lighter in the morning when we awaken, but darkness will begin sooner than we are accustomed. It's all a matter of getting used to it. No matter what the time schedule, we still only have 24 hours in a day.

Now that darkness will arrive one hour earlier, taking advantage of daylight is very important, especially if you still have fall yardwork to complete. The window for autumn yardwork remains open; but, like all windows of opportunity, it will close soon. Snow and freezing weather are on the horizon.

Five areas of gardening activity need to be addressed during autumn. They are (1) Cutting-back and Cleaning-up (2) Turfgrass maintenance (3) Planting for spring (4) Watering, and (5) Protecting. Let's examine them individually.

(1) Cutting-back and Cleaning-up

Wait until frost has caused herbaceous plants (perennials and annuals) to die back; then, begin cutting back and removing the dead foliage. Pay close attention to those plants that were bothered with insect pests. Those particular cuttings should be discarded to avoid infecting next season's growth. Be aware that some perennial plants do better if cut back in the spring. Pull up dead and declining annuals and clean up overgrown areas. Continue raking leaves from turfgrass or mulch mow. Harvest everything above the ground in the garden and remove all dead vegetation. Consider composting. Don't forget to clean tools and containers before storing.

(2) Turfgrass maintenance

Turfgrass continues to grow until the ground freezes. Continue to mow, maintaining a height of two to three inches. Fall presents the perfect time to aerate the lawn. Aeration relieves compacted soil and readily allows air, water and nutrients to reach the root zone. Autumn is the ideal time to treat for broadleaf perennial weeds such as dandelions, clover, and bindweed. Before the ground freezes, fertilize the lawn one more time with a winterizer fertilizer consisting mostly of nitrogen in slow-release form.

(3) Planting for spring

Until the ground freezes, autumn is the perfect time to plant trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and spring flowering bulbs. During autumn, the warm soil promotes good root growth and the cooler air temperatures place less stress on the plants. Furthermore, autumn often brings additional moisture.

(4) Watering

Should conditions stay dry, watering is essential. Turfgrass needs at least 1 inch of water per week through the month of November. Only water if the soil is not frozen. Newly planted trees and shrubs should not only be watered in the fall but also throughout the winter as long as the soil is not frozen. Water when air temperatures are above 40°F. Don't forget to disconnect hoses from hydrants and drain them before storing. Shut down the automatic irrigation system well before freezing temperatures arrive.

(5) Protecting

Shield plants from animals and extreme weather. Wrapping young trees is great protection for newly planted trees. Place a 2 to 3 inch layer of organic mulch around the base of trees and shrubs. The mulch helps to protect the root zone from winter kill. Take cuttings from desirable herbaceous plants and carry indoors before frost kills them. Tropical potted plants one wishes to save should be taken indoors before outdoor temperatures dip into the mid-to-low 40°s. Place them in a well-lighted area and watch for insect activity. Water sparingly. Place a saucer beneath the pot to collect excess water; then drain the excess. Remember, the goal for taking non-hardy plants indoors for the winter is not to have them thrive, but to have them simply survive.

While the window for fall gardening remains open, take advantage. In the meantime, happy Halloween and don't forget to set your clock back!