



Fall Gardening Tasks

The gardening season might be winding down, but fall is a great time for many different gardening tasks. For example, most trees, shrubs, and perennials do just as well if planted in the fall as they do if they were planted in the spring. Not to mention, they are often on sale! If planted now, or even within the coming weeks, the plant will have time to develop roots before the ground freezes. If you are planting items in the fall, make sure to water them in well, and continue to do so if the weather stays dry through the fall.

I recommend mulching around any tree, new or established, with 2-4 inches of mulch. Ideally mulch is spread out over the roots as far as the tree's canopy, because the majority of a tree's roots are found in the top 6" to 2' of soil. Mulch is so important – it helps retain moisture in the root zone, keeps the roots cooler in the hot summer months, and most importantly, protects the roots of established trees from lawnmower blades. Mulch shouldn't be placed directly against the trunk of the tree, in fact it is best if it is an inch or two away. Excess moisture at the trunk can lead to rot and canker issues.

Aerating your lawn is another key fall task. Turf naturally builds up a layer of 'thatch.' Thatch is dead and decomposing grass stems, leaves, and roots, and is that layer between the green vegetation of the turf, and the soil surface. A thick layer of thatch is detrimental to healthy turf for many reasons: First, as the thatch layer thickens, the turf starts to develop shallow roots in the thatch, other than the soil below. This causes the turf to become weaker, and more prone to disease. Second, a thick layer of thatch can interfere with the effectiveness of irrigation and fertilizer. If your lawn is new, make sure the turf grass is well established. If it's not, wait until next year to aerate.

Core aeration is the best type of aerating. In this method, small soil cores are actually pulled out of the ground. To be effective, the tines on the aerator need to penetrate the soil at least 2.5 inches below the surface. Any less than that, and the aerator tines are probably not penetrating through the layer of thatch. The soil cores that are then removed will break apart and disperse with a little time and rain.

Aeration can be done now through the end of October or early May if you would like to do it in the spring. Aerating is also something you should do every year. For extremely heavy soils, you can aerate twice a year. Regardless of the season you choose, never aerate a lawn that is very wet or dry. Aerating a wet lawn will result in a muddy compacted mess. Conversely, if your lawn is too dry, the tines will fail to penetrate the soil properly. Water your lawn, wait a couple of days, and then aerate. Aerators can be rented for those of you who like to do it yourself, or you can hire a professional lawn care company for the job. Either way you do it, aerate your lawn – you'll see the results next growing season!

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