

IN THE DIRT

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Top Ten Fall Landscape Issues

As with most changes of seasons, there are a lot of issues that all need to be addressed at the same time. Here is your top ten lawn and garden issues for the fall.

1. Fall gardens can be planted at any time now. Be sure to figure out the number of days to harvest for your fall vegetables to ensure that you will get a crop from what you are planting. The number of days to harvest is usually listed on the seed packet. Count backwards from mid- to late October to determine when to plant. Lettuce seeds take approximately 50 days until harvest so if you plant on September 3, it will take until October 23 for it to mature. So unless you plan to harvest young plants, either be prepared to provide cold protection or choose something with a shorter number of days to harvest.

2. Cleaning up your summer and fall gardens should be done annually.

Leaving the garden uncleaned throughout the winter will provide a good environment for diseases and insects to overwinter. Be sure to pull out all plants at the end of the growing season and if they had a disease problem, do not compost them. You can also apply manure in the fall to improve your soil for next year. Tilling in the fall will make it easier to prepare in the spring. Be sure to cover the bare soil with mulch of some type to reduce the amount of soil lost in our strong winter winds, or plant a winter cover crop.



3. Fall lawn care is critical to the health of your yard. Fall fertilizer is very important for grass health, so plan to make two fall fertilizer applications around Labor Day and Halloween. Overseeding may also be necessary for a lot of lawns this year, due to the drought. We can overseed our lawns after August 20 until the middle of September. The earlier, after August 20 you can reseed, the better it will do in the long run. Be sure to keep your seed moist during the germination process. However, with the continuation of summer's dry conditions, and many communities under water restrictions, you could also consider waiting until late winter and dormant seeding any damaged areas.

4. Fall webworm is a common insect we encounter in the fall, as the name implies. This is a group of caterpillars that make their home on the ends of branches of many different types of trees. Their home is a large web that includes some of the leaves on that portion of the branch. There is no reason to try to use a chemical control, because this insect does not cause serious damage, and unless the webbing is broken up beforehand the chemical will not get to the insects. If you want to get rid of them, use a broom to break up the webbing and knock the caterpillars out of your tree. With tall trees, a strong jet of water will often break up the webbing.

5. Early fall dormancy is an issue we will have to deal with this year due to this summer's heat and the drought. Many trees, including maples, oaks, and hackberry's, have been turning to their fall coloration and losing leaves early this year. There is nothing that we can do for those trees once they start this process. This is a way for them to try to avoid any more stress this year and to try to save up some energy to get started next spring.



6. Peony and iris foliage really start to look bad by the middle of July. But do wait to cut the foliage back until they completely turn brown. The leaves need to be left so the plant can photosynthesis and build up sugars for next year's flowers and growth. Fall is also a good

time to divide and replant both of these plants. Remember that Peonies need to be planted at the same depth when you move or divide them. If they are planted too deeply, they will not bloom.

7. Skunk Control. I have been having a lot of complaints about small holes dug shallowly in the yard. These holes are about the size of a half dollar. This is most likely the work of skunks digging for grubs. We can trap skunks with a live trap but cover it with a blanket or tarp. Use cat food as a lure. Captured skunks should be euthanized.

8. Ants are a common problem in the house right now. Tiny, black ants come into our kitchens in the spring and in the fall. These ants can be controlled fairly well with liquid ant bait stations, place a couple of them in the areas where you are most often finding the ants.



9. Trees can be planted in the fall and in the spring. Trees that are sold balled & burlapped or are in a container, can be planted in the fall, particularly in the months of September and October. Be sure to follow good planting guidelines, and add a ring of mulch around the trunk of the tree. Check out the "Ten Commandments for Tree Planting" for more information. But considering the ongoing dry conditions in late summer, this year you might consider waiting until spring for planting when (hopefully) rain will return and make establishment easier.

10. Finally, watering is a major issue this year, and it will continue into the fall and winter.

All trees need about one inch of water per week, so if your area is not receiving that amount of precipitation then trees that are less than five years old should be watered deeply about once a week. Trees that have been planted for more than five years, should be watered once every few weeks. When watering trees, focus on the area under the tree's dripline and a short distance beyond the outer branches. Soak the soil deeply, 12-24 inches deep, and move your sprinklers around until all sides of the tree have been watered.

Source: Nicole Stoner, UNL Extension Horticulture Educator

Harvesting and Storing Pumpkins

Many crops are ripening earlier this year. Warm early spring temperatures allowed gardeners to plant early. Hot summer conditions favored growth. Pumpkins are no exception, and they pose a special problem since many gardeners want to save them for Halloween. When harvesting has to take place early, selecting mature pumpkins, curing them properly, and storing them under the right conditions are important so your Jack o'lanterns will look great in October.

Harvesting

Pumpkins will rot if harvested too young, or if allowed to stay in the field once they are mature and exposed to freezing temperatures. Mature pumpkins should be uniformly colored across the entire fruit- orange, white, gray or blue- depending on the variety you chose to grow. Look for the mature coloration of your variety indicated on the seed packet for a guide to ripeness. Mature pumpkins have hard, shiny shells that can't be easily punctured by a fingernail. Once your pumpkin reaches this stage, it's time for curing.

Curing is a process that causes the pumpkin skin to harden and promotes healing of small wounds in the skin. Most pumpkins have already been cured when you purchase them from a store, but if you are growing your own then it is important to allow time for curing. Once a pumpkin is mature, cure it by allowing it to remain in the garden during dry, sunny weather, ideally, 80-85° F, for about 7-14 days.

If the weather is turning cold or rainy when your pumpkins reach maturity, harvest and place them in an area with 80-85° F and 80-85% relative humidity for about 10 days. A dry garage or shed works well. If pumpkins must be left in the field longer than desired, hay can be placed under them to prevent contact with damp soil, and rot. Harvest by cutting fruits away from the vine. Leave a good length of



stem for a handle. Trying to harvest by snapping the stems often causes damage to the pumpkin, and pumpkins without handles usually do not store well. But don't pick your pumpkin up by the handle, because it may break off! Transport pumpkins from the garden with care. If transporting in a vehicle, be sure to surround them with soft material so they won't roll around and be damaged.

Cleaning

Washing pumpkins is not required, but it often helps them keep longer. Wipe down or wash the exterior with a dilute bleach solution, about 1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water. Allow them to dry thoroughly. This removes surface bacteria and fungal spores.

Storage

After curing, pumpkins can be kept in cool storage at approximately 50-60° F for 10 weeks or more. 50-70% relative humidity is important to prevent shriveling or dehydration. Our grandparents used to have root cellars, which were an ideal place for vegetable storage, but most people don't have one these days. Pumpkins can be stored in a cool basement, which in many older homes, may have just the right humidity level. Place pumpkins, not touching each other on a shelf in a cool corner or in a single layer on a pallet up off the floor. In homes with lower humidity, place them in a crate, box or bushel in ventilated plastic bags. Or cover them with a plastic sheet to help retain moisture. Check on the pumpkins periodically to make sure that excess moisture is not accumulating around or beneath them, and to remove any that are beginning to rot.

Saving Seeds

Pumpkin seeds can be saved to plant the following spring. Seeds should be soaked for 24 hours to loosen the adhering pulp, cleaned well and then allowed to dry. Seeds can be stored in a clean, air-tight container in a cool, dry place. This is a fun project for kids because seeds will not always produce an identical pumpkin to those from this year's garden. Pumpkin, melon and squash seeds are a great way to attract cardinals and other birds plus squirrels to feeders during the winter months.

Chocolate-Pumpkin Cheesecake Bars

1/3 cup butter, cubed
1-1/2 ounces unsweetened chocolate,
coarsely chopped
1 tablespoon instant coffee granules
½ cup boiling water
1 cup canned pumpkin
2 eggs, lightly beaten
2 cups all-purpose flour
1-1/2 cups sugar
¾ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt

CHEESECAKE BATTER:

1 package (8 ounces) reduced-fat cream cheese
½ cup canned pumpkin
1/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¾ teaspoon ground ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
1 egg
1 cup (6 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips

- In a microwave, melt butter and chocolate; stir until smooth. Cool slightly.
- In a large bowl, dissolve coffee in water. Stir in the pumpkin, eggs and chocolate mixture.
- Combine the flour, sugar, baking soda and salt; gradually add to chocolate mixture. Transfer to a 15-in. x 10-in. x 1-in. baking pan coated with cooking spray.
- For cheesecake batter, in a small bowl, beat cream cheese and pumpkin until smooth. Beat in the sugar, vanilla and spices. Add egg; beat on low speed just until combined. Spoon over chocolate batter. Cut through batter with a knife to swirl the cheesecake portion. Sprinkle with chocolate chips.
- Bake at 350° for 20-25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out with moist crumbs (do not overbake). Cool on a wire rack. Cut into bars. Refrigerate leftovers.

Nutritional Facts 1 bar equals 197 calories, 8 g fat (5 g saturated fat), 40 mg cholesterol, 157 mg sodium, 29 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 4 g protein. Diabetic Exchanges: 2 starch, 1 fat.