

Gardening Notes for November

November is here! The cool to cold nights of October, combined with the ample rainfall has allowed most of our trees to erupt into a bonanza of spectacular colors. In addition, the soil is adequately moist to bring plants safely into the start of winter without the worry of drought. The light to heavy frosts of October have started to impact our annuals but very soon, they will need to be removed with the onset of truly cold weather. Even though the weather is becoming cooler, there is still much to do in the Garden before it can be put to bed for winter!

Things to do:

Vegetables

- For those growing carrots, beets, turnips or Jerusalem artichokes and wishing to extend the harvest into winter, apply a heavy mulch of straw to the crops to prevent the soil from freezing deep and both ruining the crop and making harvest near impossible. Parsley will continue to grow well into December, especially if covered by a basket on particularly cold nights.
- Mulch garlic with a 3-4" layer of leaves or straw to prevent heaving of the cloves throughout winter.
- Consider setting up a low tunnel and cover it with Agribon fabric (as pictured at right) to easily extend the growing and harvesting season through December. It is ideal for Bok Choi, spinach, parsley and other cool season vegetable crops.
- Remove and compost the warm season vegetables. If you witnessed signs of late blight in your tomatoes, make certain to remove all the foliage and vines of the plants from the garden. It is best to compost them separately if possible and reuse the compost in other portions of your yard outside of the vegetable garden.



Turf

- Fertilize and lime the lawn – after a soil test! November is the ideal time to develop a proper root system to get your lawn through next summer's potential heat and drought while the soil test will tell you what formulation of fertilizer is best.
- Remove heavy accumulations of leaves from lawn areas. Minor amounts can be shredded with the lawn mower and added to beds as a mulch. The fine particles remaining from cutting leaves with a mower can be allowed to filter through the grass to the ground. These leaf fragments have been found to be a good source of organic matter and beneficial minor nutrients for lawns.
 - If the soils are compacted, November is a good time to rent an aerator to provide more air to the roots. Wait several days after a rain to prevent soil compaction.

Garden

- Shred and mulch your beds with newly fallen leaves as seen at right. As mentioned above, the lawn mower can dual as a good shredder for the leaves, provided they are not too thick. When shredded, they serve as great mulch for annual, perennial and shrub beds. There is no harm in mixing in some grass clippings with the leaves.



- For woodland gardens, allow the fallen leaves to remain where they fall. They not only act as a mulch, but they protect many beneficial overwintering insects.
- Bring in all the hoses and drain outdoor pipes and irrigations systems before the start of heavy freezes later this month. We have had ample rainfall, but should several weeks pass without rain, supplemental irrigation is still needed for newly installed plants, especially evergreens.
- For Roses, Peonies, Lilacs, Dogwoods, Beebalm and other plants that may have had black spot, powdery mildew, or other foliar diseases, make certain that all the leaves that could overwinter disease organisms are removed from the base of the plants.
- Remove frosted or tired looking annuals from the flowerbeds and compost those that do not reseed or make certain the seed heads are removed. Annuals like Cleome will readily reseed and will sprout in the compost!

- Finish digging and bring *Canna*, *Alocasia*, *Colocasia* (pictured at right), and Banana tubers and roots into a cool basement or lightly heated garage. Divide the clumps and either replot them into a new container, making certain to keep the media only slightly moist for the winter or wrap them in several sheets of newspaper in order to prevent them from desiccating.



- As the frosts become more severe some perennials lacking winter interest should be cut to the ground to keep the border neat and tidy. However, it is important not to become overzealous, since the stems of most ornamental grasses and perennials provide an overwintering habitat for many of our native bees and pollinators. Others, like *Rudbeckia maxima* (Black-eyed Susan) pictured below right and *Echinacea* (Purple Cone Flower) are important sources of food for birds like Goldfinches. They can also provide attractive winter outline, as witnessed by the *Pycnanthemum muticum* (Mountain Mint) pictured at the end of the article.

- As the foliage of Bearded Iris (*Iris germanica*) turn brown with the frosts, make certain to remove all the brown foliage since the moth of the Iris Borer lays her eggs on the foliage where they will overwinter and cause harm to the rhizome next summer. Iris Borer can also be an issue with our native *Iris cristata*, so make certain to remove the frosted foliage from the Crested Iris as well. It is easily removed with a rake or by running your fingers through the plant mass.
- For those with Fig trees, late November is the time to wrap your plants or bring them into a cool basement or garage if they are in a container.
- Finish planting bulbs. Remember, they need to be planted to a depth of 3x the diameter of the bulb. The task will often take longer than we think, so allocate a fair amount of time to the task so the bulbs can be planted at the correct depth. For a more mature and impactful display, it is best to plant several bulbs per hole, especially for the smaller bulbs like Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa*) and Snowdrops (*Galanthus*). Some garden centers may offer sales towards the end of the month.
- Remove the seed heads from Asters as soon as they finish flowering to prevent self-sowing should that not be desired. Many a pink flowered cultivar will magically become blue flowered as the seedlings overwhelm the desired selection. There are other ornamentals that can become weedy as well. Plants like *Allium cernuum*, the Nodding Onion (pictured at right) are a wonderful ornamental that adds attractive 'balloon-like' flower umbels to the August Garden. Unfortunately, the small seeds tend to fall into neighboring plants where they are not wanted and lead to additional weeding chores for next summer.
- Continue to remove cool season weeds as time permits! Getting ahead of them now will help to prevent them from flowering and going to seed come spring.
- Finish emptying clay containers that can crack over the winter and store them in a protected area or upside down and under a tarp if left out-of-doors. For terracotta pots,



make certain that the pottery is washed well to remove any built-up fertilizer salts and place out in the sun to ensure that they dry thoroughly before storing.

- Dig and remove Gladiolus bulbs from containers or flower beds and store in an onion bag or lightly moist peat moss for the winter. I prefer hanging the onion bags in a lightly heated garage as it keeps them out of harms way from the mice. Plants like the white and purple *Gladiolus murielae* (Abyssinian Gladiolus) pictured above right, only develop larger corms and plants with the passing of the years!
- Near mid-month, pot up Paperwhite Daffodils and Amaryllis for indoor Holiday displays or gifts.
- Look over your Garden and contemplate which areas are in need of interest in the form of plants with fruit, form or evergreen foliage. November is still a great time to plant deciduous shrubs and many perennials. In fact, some may be discounted at your local garden center! It is important to mulch your newly planted selections with 3-4 inches of mulch in order to retain moisture and reduce potential frost heaving for smaller plants.
- If you purchase container grown plants at the end of the season, check to make certain their roots are not encircling the soil mass, as seen in the image at the right. If so, make certain to tease apart the root ball thoroughly as you plant. This will prevent girdling roots and the loss of plant vigor or even death of the plant as it matures in the years to come.
- Believe it or not, there are plants that are still in full bloom at the start of November. *Allium kiiense* or Kii Garlic is a native of Japan that starts to bloom in mid-October and is still in bloom come mid-November. I have seen it looking very respectable and the foliage green after 22 degrees of frost! Full sun and well-drained soils.



Houseplants

- For the houseplants that you brought indoors during October, continue to monitor them for insects and resist the temptation to overwater!
- Remember to rotate the plants 90° or so every couple of weeks. This ensures the plant will not stretch in one direction towards the light. This is especially true when you first bring the plants indoors, as they are still actively growing and are prone to grow towards the sunlight.

- Gradually reduce the amount of irrigation to the plants to once every two weeks and for succulents once a month since the plants are slowing growth with the shortening days.
- Although the sun is weaker, watch the sun patterns for houseplants that like shade. As the sun gets lower in the sky, areas near a window may be getting more sunlight now than was evident in September.



Happy Thanksgiving!

- Save some interesting seed capsules from perennials such as Blackberry Lily, (formerly *Belamcanda chinensis* now *Iris domestica*) as seen at right and combine them with late blooming Asters, dried Hydrangea flower and fruited stems of Holly or Beautyberry (*Callicarpa* species) for a wonderful Thanksgiving centerpiece.
- Enjoy a Happy and Wholesome Thanksgiving with your family and friends!



Bruce Crawford

Manager of Horticulture, Morris County Park Commission