Gardening Notes for November



Persicaria affinis



Magnolia grandiflora



Muscari neglectum

November is here! The cool nights of October have allowed many of our trees to erupt into spectacular fall colors and the light frosts of October have also started to impact our annuals. Recording the low temps and the response of your plants to the chill are important tools for better understanding your garden. Even though the weather is becoming cooler and the garden looks 'sleepy', there remains much to do to prepare our garden for winter! Fortunately, there are moments to enjoy the fall color of Himalayan Fleece Flower (*Persicaria affinis*) or the autumn fruits of our Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) that are in full display. Even the foliage of Baby's Breath Grape Hyacinths (*Muscari neglectum* 'Baby's Breath') looks defiantly happy despite the chill!

Things to do:

<u>Vegetables</u>

- For those growing carrots, beets, turnips or Jerusalem artichokes and wish to extend the harvest into winter, apply a heavy mulch of straw to the crops to prevent the soil from freezing deep. A deep freeze both ruins the crop and makes 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 remainder of 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 and reuse this compost in other portions of your yard, far from 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. Submitting a soil test will tell you what formulation of fertilizer is best or, should the soil be too acidic, the amount of lime needed to adjust the pH. It is best to wait until after a good rain to fertilize, should conditions become dry. Soil test kits are available at your County Extension Office and the results will be emailed to you.
- 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 on the lawn 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 provide beneficial minor nutrients for the lawn.
- If the soils are compacted, November is a good time to rent an aerator. Wait several days after a rain to prevent further soil compaction and compromising your efforts!

Garden

- Shred and mulch your beds with newly fallen leaves as seen at right. As mentioned, the lawn mower can dual as a good leaf shredder, provided they are not too thick or wet. When shredded, leaves serve as a 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. 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 to remove all the leaves from the base of the plants as they could overwinter spores of these diseases.
- 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, Jewels of Opar (*Talinum paniculatum*) and Tassel Flower (*Emilia*) will readily reseed and sprout wherever the 'seedy compost' is spread!



- As the frosts become more severe, perennials that lack 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 overwintering habitats for many of our native bees and pollinators. Others, like *Rudbeckia maxima* (Black-eyed Susan) pictured above 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) as seen in the closing image.



- Finish digging and bring *Canna*, *Alocasia*, *Colocasia* (pictured at rogjt), and Banana (*Musa*) tubers/roots into a cool basement or lightly heated garage. Divide the clumps, cut back the foliage and either repot into a new container, making certain to keep the media only slightly moist for the winter or less desirable, wrap them in several sheets of newspaper to limit desiccation. For Banana, it is often more efficient to save and overwinter the offshoots (pups) and discard the large central stem. Make certain the winter temperatures remain around 55. If too much warmer, the plants will start to grow and if below 50 they usually perish.



- As the foliage of Bearded Iris (*Iris germanica*) turns brown with the frosts, make certain to remove all the brown foliage close to the rhizome. The moth of the Iris Borer lays her eggs on the foliage where they will overwinter and ultimately harm the rhizome next summer. Iris Borer can also be an issue with our native *Iris cristata*, as I have discovered one summer, so you may wish to remove this foliage as well (pictured above). This foliage is easily removed with a rake or by running your fingers through the leaves. Or, you can take the chance and leave it as mulch, which is what I do!



- 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. *Allium cernuum*, the Nodding Onion (pictured above) is a wonderful ornamental that is native to North America. It adds attractive 'balloon-like' flower umbels to the August Garden. The resulting small seeds unfortunately tend to fall into neighboring plants and germinate. Siberian Bugloss (*Brunnera macrophylla*) is another aggressively seeding ornamental requiring equally aggressive removal of seedlings.



- 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 for the process 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*), Snowdrops (*Galanthus*) or Crocus. Many garden centers and mail order businesses (now via emails and online) will offer sales this month. If you are looking for a different bulbous Iris, consider *Iris bucharica*. A 25-year-old clump is pictured above in mid-April. Great for full sun and soils of average moisture, it goes dormant in late June.
- For those with Fig trees, late November is the time to lightly prune your plant and wrap them with burlap. Or, if they are in containers, bring them into a cool basement or garage and keep them on the dry side for the winter to sustain dormancy.



- 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 pots that can crack over the winter and store them in a protected area or, if left out-of-doors, upside down under a tarp or deck. Wash the containers well to remove any fertilizer salts and for terra cotta, place them 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 harm's way and away from the mice. Plants like the white and purple *Gladiolus murielae* (Abyssinian Gladiolus) often develop larger corms and plants over time when the corms are overwintered!

- If you purchase container grown plants during end of season sales, check to make certain their roots are not encircling the soil mass, as seen for *Orixa japonica* 'Pearl Frost' above 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 as it matures in the years to come.



- Believe it or not, there are plants that are still in full bloom in November. *Allium kiiense* or Kii Garlic (pictured above right) 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 a rich green after 22 degrees of frost! Full sun and well-drained soils.
- Look over your Garden and contemplate which areas are in need of autumn interest with fruit, form or evergreen foliage. November is still a great time to plant deciduous shrubs, although it is getting late for perennials. Many shrubs and trees 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 of smaller plants.
- If you are looking for a shrub to provide seasonal floral interest, consider our native Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) as seen above. The flowers appear anytime from late September through December, depending upon the selection. That is a good reason to select your plants in person, since you can see which plants bloom later for November interest when little else is in flower!



- Near mid-month, pot up Paperwhite Daffodils and Amaryllis for indoor Holiday displays or gifts.

<u>Houseplants</u>

- 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.

- Gradually reduce watering to once every two weeks and for succulents once a month since the plants are no longer growing as actively.
- If you have *Tillandsia* or Air Plants, soak them in tepid water in a sink once a month.
- For most houseplants, especially succulents, stop fertilizing the plants until late March when they start to re-initiate active growth.





Happy Thanksgiving!

- It is centerpiece time! Save some interesting seed capsules from perennials such as Blackberry Lily (*Iris domestica*), as seen at top on the right or Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis* 'Huskers Red'), second from top. Combine them with late blooming Asters, dried Hydrangea (as pictured below) and fruited stems of Holly, Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos albus* as pictured at right) or Beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica* 'Leucocarpa' as pictured below right) for a wonderful centerpiece!
- Enjoy a Happy and Wholesome Thanksgiving with your family and friends!



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