

Will you be ready to start gardening at the first sign of spring? September and October are months to accomplish many of the most important gardening tasks before another long winter settles in. Much of next year's garden success depends upon the care your garden is given now. Gardening is always about "next year". Look over this year's garden; note successes to continue and make plans to avoid repeat disappointments.

Fall gardening can be loosely divided into two types of activity that often coalesce:

(1) Preparing for next spring by planting and transplanting trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs; and by fertilizing, mulching, preparing soil and creating new beds. -and-

(2) Preparing for winter by harvesting, cleaning-up, cutting-back, staking, tying and putting away tools, etc...("winterizing" our next classes).

**Watering** - Cut way back on watering now if you haven't already. Too much constant water late in the season keeps plants in a succulent state and makes them more susceptible to dieback in the cold. [Too little water however, especially with new plantings, and plants may die.] Once leaves begin to turn color and drop it is ok to increase watering a little. Water is essential for explosive fall root growth. Water new plantings at least once a month after October unless they receive plenty of snow or rain. Use Thanksgiving as a reminder to send your garden into winter deeply watered. If no snow is present by Christmas, hand water new plantings again ("once a month all winter if there is no substantial snowfall"... really).

**Collecting Seed** – Many native and cultivated plants are producing seed right now. In most cases, the seedpods must be opening and the seed nearly ripe before they can be harvested (clients occasionally bring us fresh flowers and ask where to collect the seed). Easy seeds to harvest: poppy, Cosmos, Lychnis, columbine, Delphinium, Aster, hollyhock, Penstemon, lily, wild rose, currant, gooseberry, mt. ash, thimbleberry, dogwood, snowberry, Jeffrey pine, lodgepole pine, fir, etc... Create a "seed bed" in a partial shade location with a loose "peat-light" (peat moss, perlite, vermiculite) amended soil. Wildflower planting could be a class in itself.

**"Fall is for Planting!"** Many trees, shrubs and perennials will do as much as 80% of their annual root system expansion in fall. After collecting heat all summer, the soil is NOW as warm as it gets. Anyone who has ever grown vegetable seeds indoors knows the importance of soil warmth and the tremendous difference it makes in promoting root growth. Without the foliage demanding constant moisture (because of cooler temperatures, cessation of top growth and soon, lack of leaves) most of the plant's energy is dedicated to establishing roots. As the sugars and other nutrients are transported into the roots, water floods into the cells by osmosis. The result is rapid expansion of the entire root system. Fall planted trees, shrubs and perennials will have spreading root systems better positioned to take advantage of the spring snow melt long before most of us begin spring plantings.

Perennials planted this fall will bloom with our seasons and expand throughout next summer. Perennials planted next spring won't really settle in until the following summer; "we are always planting for **next** year".

**Divide** perennials now, while the soil is warm. Bleeding heart, daylily, monkshood, Phlox, Siberian iris and more may be dug up and cut or pulled apart and replanted. Give each division the same soil preparation, slow releasing organic fertilizer and mulch as you would any new plant. Water well.

Lilac, aspen, chokecherry, thimbleberry some willows and Spiraea produce sprouts from shallow lateral roots that may be divided from the main plant. When their leaves are showing fall color they may be dug up with as much root as possible. Make a clean cut on the main lateral root, replant as you would a new tree or shrub taking care not to plant the new division too deep.

**Transplanting** is one of the best facets of perennial gardening. If a plant doesn't grow or bloom well in one location, move it. Fall is a good time to move perennials to a better location. Trees and shrubs that planted in the past 3 years can usually be moved safely as well.

**Cuttings** - Cuttings are an easy (and cheap) way to propagate many shrubs. Cotoneaster, Lonicera, Ribes, Rosa, Salix, Spiraea, Viburnum are all genera that grow easily from cuttings. Cuttings should be from canes grown during the current season at least a pencil's thickness in diameter. Trim the bottom of the cutting just below a leaf node and just above one at the top (8-18" long). Dip the bottom of the cutting into rooting hormone. One Wise garden encyclopedia says to "Make a slit trench in an out-of-the-way place in your garden. Refill the trench to 1/3 with sharp sand (never use soft builders sand). Put the cutting about 5 inches apart into the sand with about 3" above ground. Refill the trench with loose, rich soil." We find that simply sticking the cuttings into loose rich soil works pretty well.

**Bulbs** - Bulbs should be planted NOW! and anytime before the soil freezes solid (Dec.)... we've continued to plant bulbs well into January in some warm years. Plant with a great bulb fertilizer like Biosol, fish bone meal or rock phosphate. Plant into rich, well draining soil. To achieve the greatest effect, plant single varieties of bulbs *en masse*. You can, put several types of bulbs in the same large planting hole. Protect tulips from ground squirrels with chicken wire, hardware cloth, Ropel spray, or by planting with garlic.

**Organic fertilizers** like the **Dr. Earth** and **Gardener and Bloome** bio-active lines and **Biosol**, applied in the fall, slowly break down with the biological activity of your soil. They release small amounts of nutrients during fall root growth and are readily available in the early spring when plants begin to wake up after winter. Most chemical fertilizers will leach through the soil (into the ground water) over winter, wasting nutrients and depriving plants. Always add slow release organic fertilizer when planting any time of the year. Do not feed plants liquid chemical fertilizers in Fall.

**Mulch** is loose compost spread thickly on the soil surface around plantings to preserve soil moisture and improve the soil composition. All of your plants should have this sort of fresh mulch added at planting and kept-up thereafter. Protect and feed your soil, and your life as a gardener, will be much, much easier.

Winter mulches of mature compost (Gromulch or Soil Building Compost) or pine needles may be spread in late fall over freezing or frozen soil in order to help keep the soil frozen. This protects plants from the destructive effects of repeated freeze / thaw cycles that can ruin roots or lift plants out of the ground by the “heaving” of the soil. In the case of hardy bulbs, late mulching over the frozen crust, keeps voles from burrowing.

Most plants will benefit from a layer of mulch over their generally shallow roots to shade them from our winter sun and prevent desiccation in our very drying climate. Pine needles or fir boughs may be lightly placed over perennials with exposed crowns or late basil rosettes of leaves (Peony, Oriental Poppy, Lupine, Foxglove). This is unnecessary when many feet of snow cover the ground but we never know when that will be.

Occasionally mulches may be used to keep the soil in a bed unfrozen for a little longer so that certain bulbs (Iris) may be planted after the normal planting season is over.

**Lawns** – Lawn care for homeowners has always been a little different than it is for golf courses. As many courses use more natural methods, the differences have lessened. Even with the best soil preparation, the rich organics we add to our soils eventually break down and need to be replaced. Top-dress at least once a year (with Topper) use organic fertilizers (Dr. Earth and Biosol) and use a mulching mower so the beneficial microbes have something to turn into compost. The use of bioactive, organic fertilizers both feeds and inoculates the soil in order to establish a healthy soil eco-system.

If you have sod, you should be aerating your lawn twice a year for the first 3-5 years and once every year (or two) after that. Sod from Nevada is produced in sandy alkaline clay that compresses quickly with traffic and with our heavy snow load. This impenetrable layer of “adobe” suffocates roots and inhibits water infiltration. Aerating twice a year makes loads of holes through the clay that fill with Topper and organic fertilizers. Top dressing is essential and aerating is recommended for seeded lawns as well. Thatching is seldom necessary.

**Houseplants** - Bring Begonias, Impatiens, Ivy and Zonal Geraniums inside before hard frosts (or is it too late already?)- Spray them with insecticidal soap and / or Neem first, to knock down any potential insect pests.

Now is a good time to transplant houseplants while you can still do it outside; it can be a messy job in the house. Make sure the potting soil is warm before you transplant. It is a great idea to take **all** your houseplants outside for a wash with insecticidal soap (**Jungle Rain**) and a plant polish with **Neem**, Volk or Superior Oil (which also kill insects and their eggs) before winter.

# Sharing Mountain Horticultural Expertise with Truckee Gardeners since 1975

**Classes are taught by trained and experienced botanists,  
landscapers, arborists and garden professionals.**

We have many years of personal and vicarious mountain gardening experiences to share and we've killed thousands of plants in our own gardens (trying them) so our clients won't have to.

Before you experiment, learn from the trials and errors of others. All classes are held at the Villager Nursery, 10678 Donner Pass Rd. Pre-registration is requested (587-0771) but drop-ins are welcome. *We like to have an idea of the number of attendees because we put time and energy into class preparation.* Our classes run nearly weekly from May-Nov, if you'd like a class schedule, e-mail a request to [eric@villagernursery.com](mailto:eric@villagernursery.com)

**September 25 - Saturday, 10-11:30 am: Fall Colors for Your Garden** – See the trees, shrubs, and perennials with the most colorful leaves, persistent berries or super-late blooms. We'll cover the chemistry and the natural artistry of a showy fall garden.

**October 2 - Saturday, 10-11:30 am: Fall Color Walk** - take a leisurely stroll with us through Brickletown and Downtown to see and discuss the trees, shrubs and perennials with the best fall displays. [We'll walk from the nursery and back ~1mi. roundtrip.](#)

**October 9 - Saturday, 10-11:30 am: Fall Planting** - October is a time to plant, transplant and divide trees, shrubs, bulbs and perennials. Collect seed, propagate cuttings, fertilize, mulch, prepare soil and prepare new beds. Ready the garden for next year's growth. [Deciduous trees and shrubs put on as much as 80% of their annual expansive root growth in the fall, after they lose their leaves.](#)

**October 16 - Saturday, 10-11:30 am: "Winterizing" your garden** - One of the most attended seminars every year. Find-out what to do so your garden will suffer the least and rise as healthy as possible in the spring. Protecting your plants from animals and the weather. Harvesting, cutting back perennials, tying trees and shrubs, mulching, preparing your lawn putting away tools, and more.