

LAWN SEEDING DEADLINE NEARS

September is the best month to reseed cool-season lawns such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. However, you can get by with an early to mid-October planting for tall fescue. October 15 is generally considered the last day for safely planting or overseeding a tall fescue lawn in the fall. If you do attempt a late seeding, take special care not to allow plants to dry out. Anything that slows growth will make it less likely that plants will mature enough to survive the winter. Seedings done after the cut-off date can be successful, but the success rate goes down the later the planting date. Late plantings that fail are usually not killed by cold temperatures but rather desiccation. The freezing and thawing of soils heave poorly rooted grass plants out of the ground, which then dry and die. Keeping plants watered will help maximize root growth before freezing weather arrives.

Planting Trees in the Fall

The fall season can be an excellent time to plant trees. During the spring, soils are cold and may be so wet that low oxygen levels inhibit root growth. The warm and moist soils associated with fall encourage root growth. Fall root growth means the tree becomes established well before a spring-planted tree and is better able to withstand summer stresses. However, certain trees do not produce significant root growth during the fall and are better planted in the spring. These include beech, birch, redbud, magnolia, tulip poplar, willow oak, scarlet oak, black oak, willows, and dogwood. Fall-planted trees require some special care. Remember, that roots are actively growing even though the top is dormant. Make sure the soil stays moist but not soggy. This may require watering not only in the fall but also during the winter months if we experience warm spells that dry the soil. Mulch also is helpful because it minimizes moisture loss and slows the cooling of the soil so root growth continues as long as possible. Evergreens should be moved earlier in the fall than deciduous plants. They need at least six weeks before the ground freezes for the roots to become established.

Adding Organic Materials Directly to the Garden

If the severe summer weather has brought an early end to your garden, consider adding organic materials directly to the soil rather than composting. Materials such as residue from lawn renovation, rotted hay, or rotted silage can be added and then tilled in. Coarser materials such as tree leaves or garden residue should be shredded. A lawn mower with a bagging attachment can be used to shred this material and collect it in one operation. Organic materials can be spread to a depth of about 3 inches and tilled in. Be sure the soil is not too wet before tilling. During warm weather, the material will decompose quickly and the process can be repeated every two weeks. Later in the fall, it may take longer. This process can be repeated from now until late November to early December. Remember that organic matter helps almost any soil. It improves clay soil by improving tilth, aeration and how quickly the soil takes up water. In sandy soils, it acts as a sponge by holding water and nutrients.

Garlic Planting Time

October is a good time to plant garlic (*Allium sativum*) if you want large quality cloves next summer. Apply 3 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet and mix into the soil before planting or fertilize according to soil test. Plant individual cloves point up and spaced 6 inches apart and 1 to 2 inches deep. The larger the clove planted, the larger the bulb at harvest. Water in well and mulch with straw to conserve soil warmth and encourage good establishment. Harvest will not occur until next summer. Test dig when the lower 1/3 of the foliage is yellow. If the cloves have segmented, it is time to harvest. If they haven't segmented, wait another week or two.

Elephant garlic (*Allium ampeloprasum*) should also be planted now. It is a plant with a milder garlic flavor and is actually a closer relative to the leek than to true garlic.

Moving Houseplants Inside for the Winter

Many people with houseplants move some of them outside for the summer to give them better growing conditions and help them recover from the stress of an indoor environment. But as fall approaches and night temperatures approach 50 F, it is time to think about bringing plants inside for the winter. Plants that have spent the summer outside should be inspected for insects and disease before bringing them inside. A sharp spray from a garden hose can remove insects or mites from houseplant foliage. Insects in the potting soil can be forced out by soaking the pot in a tub of lukewarm water for about 15 minutes. Houseplants that have been kept outdoors are used to receiving much more sunlight than they do indoors. So how do we help houseplants adjust to the lower light levels inside?

Houseplants brought in from outside should be started out in an area of the home that receives plenty of light, and then gradually moved to their permanent, darker location. This process should take four to eight weeks depending on the degree of difference in light levels between the initial and final location of the plant. Understanding plant processes allows us to anticipate potential problems. Acclimatization gives houseplants a greater chance of retaining leaves and avoiding the stress of completely replacing them.