

Column # 153 October Tasks in the Garden

Written by Mitzi VanSant

Sunday, 10 November 2013 23:00 -

I will continue with my ongoing articles on Foliage Color in the Garden next week, but want to take time now to say that this is the very best time of the year for planting all these various trees, along with shrubs, perennials, grasses, and vines. The weather is cooling off, and we are beginning to have some substantial if intermittent rains.

Both these factors are important to getting new plantings off to a good start.

Then, over winter and spring, the plants can grow new roots (and a little top-growth, too) which will help carry them through their first summer of blazing heat and uncertain rainfall.

It is also time to prepare your grass for winter. I always spread corn gluten meal (the kind with texture of cat litter) over my lawn around mid-month to both fertilize (9-0-0 formulation) and to act as an organic pre-emergent herbicide. This helps quite a bit to prevent winter annual weeds from sprouting, if applied just before our really cool weather arrives. Smith Supply usually carries a few bags on hand, but will also order for you if they don't have any in stock. You should know it is quite expensive, however, since corn in any form is at a premium.

You should be in "full swing" with planting your fall vegetable garden. Plants that should be seeded or set out from transplants (t) now are: Beets, Broccoli (t), Brussels Sprouts (t), Cauliflower (t), Chard (t), Garlic, Kale, Lettuce, Onion, Parsley (t), Parsnip, English/Snap/Chinese Peas, Radish, Shallots, and Spinach.

Fall is the best time to divide iris and other perennials and set them into their new homes, either in your garden or the garden of friends. Lift the iris rhizomes, divide them (discarding any rotten or diseased parts), replant and fertilized with bone meal.

Now is also the time to plant wildflowers. They will grow small leaves while the days are short and cool, and then be ready to grow larger and flower in the spring-fall. By choosing native wildflowers, shrubs, and perennials you will encourage various types of wildlife in your garden. These native plants will bloom, seed, and go dormant at the appropriate time for local bees and butterflies, and also for fauna such as birds (including hummingbirds), small and large mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and snakes (yes there are some good ones). My favorite book on this subject is Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife by local conservation biologist Kelly Conrad Bender.

October and November are also the appropriate months to plants most bulbs for our Southern

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gardens. Bulbs, like fruit trees, are affected by the amount of winter chill hours, and not all bulbs are successful here. Tulips, common Hyacinths, and many of the Narcissus/Daffodils will bloom but not return the next year. I usually give both common and botanical name when I suggest plants, but there is not room here. I may expand on this subject later on my website, so you might check there in the future. For now, Iris, Oxblood Lily, Spring Snowflake, Spider Lily, Hardy Amaryllis. (*H. x johnsonii*), Crinum Lily, Rain Lily, Spanish Bluebells, Grape Hyacinth, Byzantine Gladiolus, Ranunculus and Anemone, and the Madonna and Easter Lily are all suitable to our Zone 8B climate here in Central Texas. Daffodils/Narcissus in the classifications *N. tazetta*, *N. jonquilla*, *N. cyclamineus*, *N. odorus*, and *N. papyracius* (Paperwhites) are also reliable and should return year to year.

In my next columns I will comment on Non-Native Trees, and then Shrubs, Perennials, Grasses, and Vines that provide good autumn color in the garden. I welcome hearing from you about your suggestions and experiences with such plants; you can email me through my website at www.thefragrantgarden.com