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**OCTOBER GARDEN CHECKLIST**

By Kitty Angell

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October is a busy month for the gardener. Many tasks need to be accomplished, including garden cleanup, bed preparation, and planting of winter vegetables, herbs and annuals. It is also perfect for planting new bulbs, shrubs, and trees.

“I Wish You Roses in December” is a true phrase here. It’s not unusual to see roses blooming in December in the coastal bend. They are especially beautiful in October. Remember to deadhead spent blooms and they’ll be spectacular until the first frost!

Reduce disease and insect potential in next year’s garden by removing spent annuals and also the tops of all herbaceous perennials that have finished flowering. If you use what gardeners refer to as “black gold” (compost), spread it now and top off with a layer of mulch after you’ve cleaned up the garden beds.

If you haven’t fertilized your lawn in the last few months, do so by mid-October. Be very careful if you have palm trees in your yard, as ordinary lawn fertilizer provides too much nitrogen and none of the trace elements that palms require. Also, over-pruning your palms will deprive them of their nutrients and could cause an early death. Only cut fronds that are mostly brown.

Pruning trees and shrubs should be done with only the offending or dead branches removed. Do not top crepe myrtles. If you are uncertain about pruning techniques visit <http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/prunelargetreelimg.html>. Many people prefer planting trees January through March, but our mild climate allows the trees and shrubs to get a head start and put down deeper roots when planted in the fall.

Try planting one or two medium-sized shrubs that bring variety to your landscape and provide food and nesting for birds. American Beautyberry and agarita are good examples of woody multi-stemmed plants that grow between 5-9 feet.

Vegetable seeds to plant include beets, spinach, lettuce, collards, turnips, mustard, radish, as well as English and snap peas. Transplants of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, multiplier onions and garlic bulbs can still be planted.

We have two types of soil in our area: sand and clay. Be sure you know what type of soil you’re working with before planting bulbs for spring. Bulbs need a well-prepared bed, and the base of the bulb is set three times deeper than the diameter of the bulb. In sandy soil, set deeper and in clay soils less deeply.

After the leaves fall off plumerias, stop watering and move the pots into the garage. This usually happens in late October. Do not water plumerias during the winter. Cuttings can now be taken. Let the cuttings cure over winter and pot them in the spring. Plumeria cuttings will rot if potted when freshly cut.

Once your garden beds are rejuvenated, you’ll be ready to plant pansies when they become available at the garden centers. Remember they need a well-drained bed and at least a half day of sun. Also check your nurseries for started plants of snapdragons, pinks, sweet Williams, poppies, and calendulas. In our moderate climate there is no need for a drab landscape. You can also plant seeds of sweet peas during October/November. Make sure they get at least a half-day of sun and protection from north winds.

Don’t forget October is the month to plant wildflowers. When sowing wildflower seeds for the first time, don’t expect a 100% success rate. Unlike most flower seeds, wildflower seeds have not been bred to achieve certain traits like rapid germination, color, height, or adaption to specific soil types or climates. Mother Nature plays a large role in the success or failure of wildflower plantings. Also, soil drainage problems in your planting area could impede the germination of your seeds. Do not fertilize wildflowers. Fertilization after the plants are established will encourage the growth of weeds, and cause profuse foliage and very few blooms.

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