

October 2014

October Gardening Tips

by Donna Hagar

As the days get cooler and chances of rain return, we are all finding it to be far more enjoyable to be back in the garden. If you are like me, there some chores that need to be done, as well as some fun things to get excited about!

First and foremost, if you haven't cleaned up your summer veggie garden, now is time to do so. Any dead or spent veggie plants can go straight to the compost if they aren't diseased.

If you are wanting some fall crops, there is still time but you will need to get on it PDQ. Add compost to your garden and work it in the top few inches. There is still time for root veggies – beets, carrots, radishes, turnips and parsnips if you lean that way. Also greens such as collards, kale, lettuce, mustard, spinach and Swiss chard. Maybe now you will want to try some Chinese cabbage varieties, bok choy, tat soy or pak choy. And of course, get the garlic in! And as most people are unaware, cilantro is a cool season plant, so it goes in now, too.



Veggies not your thing? How about annuals for color? Pansies can go in, as well as pinks, dianthus, ornamental kale, snapdragons. Don't forget, Swiss chard comes in many colors and withstands the winter quite well. If you haven't eaten it before, give it a try! Mix some in with your landscape and save a trip or two to the grocery store for veggies! Spring flowering bulbs, daffodils and narcissus go in this month.

Fall is actually the ideal time for planting container grown trees and shrubs and many perennials. Getting them in now gives them several months head start to get their roots established before the spring growth and hot, dry summers next year.

Divide those perennials now, as well. Daylilies, iris, oxeye and Shasta daisies, coreopsis, purple coneflower all will handle a fall transplant or being passed along to some favorite friend. Leave ornamental grass inflorescence for fun winter color. Trim just before spring growth begins.

This is your last chance to get wildflower seeds out as well but get to it quick. Make sure there is good seed to soil contact for best germination. Fall rains and Mother Nature should take care of the rest.



And last but not least, mulch, mulch, mulch! Get a new 2-4" fresh layer of mulch on all those existing beds to protect it from potential early freezes! (Don't cover seeds in the garden tho or they won't sprout!) It also helps retain moisture thru the winter and prevents weed seeds from germinating. Just be sure to water those beds good before adding the mulch.

Cowitch Plant (Mucuna pruriens)

by Marilyn Cranford, Somervell County Master Gardener

Have you ever seen a plant called Cowitch? Actually, I haven't either, but due to some quick research I've come up with the following that might be helpful in identifying this very prolific and hardy southern plant.



Cowitch or Mucuna Pruriens is a member of the legume family. It likes to climb or vine and grows up to 30 feet in length. Its flowers are typically dull purple, lavender or even white in color, and the plant forms compound leaves that grow 4-10 inches long. Additionally, it produces pods which contain 3-6 large black seeds. These pods have barbed hairs that cause an intense stinging irritation to the skin.

Research reveals that the Cowitch plant has many traditional and medicinal usages including the easing of abdominal pain, diabetes, in-fertility, and treatment for snake and scorpion bites. Due to the large amount of levo-dopa in the seed, it is used

for treating Parkinson's disease.

Unless you want to grow this plant for its medicinal properties, it is probably something you do not want in your garden. Once planted, it is extremely difficult to get rid of. Trying to dig it up is similar to trying to get rid of nut grass, but much worse. BEWARE !!!



Fall Lawn Fertilizing

by Bonnah Boyd, Somervell County Master Gardener

Fall lawn fertilization is equally as important as spring fertilization. It prolongs fall color, increases winter hardiness, promotes earlier spring green-up and helps maintain a dense turf that resists winter weeds.

The best way to pinpoint the time to fertilize is by monitoring your mowing frequency. When you don't need to mow for 2 weeks, the time to fertilize is at hand. In general, fall fertilization of warm-season grasses should occur between October 1 and 15 in this area.

Fertilizers used in the fall should be high in nitrogen and potassium and low in phosphorus (or no phosphorus). A 2-1-2 or 1-0-1 ratio of nutrients is preferred. The fertilizer should be a combination of quick-and slow-release nitrogen portion of the forms to encourage production of carbohydrates. These carbohydrates are then stored in the roots for use in earlier spring greening of the lawn and as an energy source for the grass during winter stress.

The amount of fertilizer to apply is 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Look on the fertilizer bag for guidance on how much area the bag will cover. (*Some organic fertilizers contain less than half the nitrogen of "conventional" or chemical fertilizers. Be sure to apply enough organic fertilizer to gain the results you expect.*)

The easiest way to broadcast lawn fertilizer is by using a walk-behind spreader on wheels. To spread the calculated amount of fertilizer evenly across the entire lawn, follow these guidelines:

- Determine how many sections you have in the lawn that you can easily walk the spreader around without stopping, going across driveways, or through gates.
- Divide the amount of fertilizer proportionally based on the number and size of sections.
- Divide each section's fertilizer amount in half, and pour half into the spreader.
- Cut back the spreader setting to the smallest opening that still lets the fertilizer pellets flow out of the hopper easily. Be careful not to apply too much fertilizer too fast.
- Turn the spreader on, and walk it north to south across the lawn and keep going back and forth until the spreader is empty.
- Fill the spreader with the other half of the section's fertilizer, and walk the spreader east to west, back and forth, until the spreader is empty.
- Water the lawn thoroughly to activate the fertilizer and prevent fertilizer burn on the grass.

Try not to fertilize prior to a predicted heavy rain. Nitrogen, and other fertilizer nutrients, can easily run off in heavy rains into the storm sewers and into creeks and streams. Nitrogen can cause an "algae bloom" that consumes oxygen in the water to the point of killing fish.

Reference: Doug Welch's TEXAS GARDEN ALMANAC

Community Horticultural Educational Series

Community Horticultural Educational Series (CHES)

Somervell County Master Gardeners are proud to announce

Paul Dowlearn is coming back to Glen Rose!

Monday, October 13th, at 6:30 p.m.

Citizen's Center, 209 SW Barnard, Glen Rose

Free and open to the public

Paul Dowlearn is the co-owner of Wichita Valley Landscape, past president of the Red River Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas, member of the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Research Center, Riverbend Nature Center and Texas Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association and several other non-profit organizations.

Paul has lived in Wichita Falls, Texas since he was three years old and has been an avid gardener since childhood. Paul does landscape design and installation through his nursery in Wichita Falls, and has focused on xeriscape and low maintenance landscapes for the last twenty years.

Paul has authored numerous articles on native and well-adapted plants, plus organic gardening methods for newspapers and magazines, as well as speaking to many organizations throughout Texas and Oklahoma. He has hosted local radio and TV call-in shows and teaches landscaping courses at Vernon College. **His new book, The Lazy Man's Garden, will be available for sale and signing at the meeting!**

