






Tips for the Garden – October

 Now is a great time to plant regular, dwarf, and pillar fruit trees for next year. They can be planted in the ground or in very large containers 36" or larger. Check out <http://www.starkbros.com/growing-guide/article/fruit-trees-in-containers-pt1/> <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=321>


 Plant fall blooming mums in perennial borders now. When purchasing mums for the garden, select ones with a good amount of buds so that you'll have a longer bloom period. Make sure that the varieties that you are selecting are hardy for your region – most are, but double check with the garden center.


 Plant ornamental and garden variety kale plants now for use in garnishing, eating or visual interest. Garden kale can be picked throughout the cooler weather. Kale is the sweetest when picked with a light frost on the leaves. Wash and cut and sauté in a bit of butter or olive oil for a quick side dish. You can roast kale in the oven sprinkled with a bit of olive oil and kosher salt for wonderful kale crisps.

 If you still have tomatoes in your garden – the colder night temperatures will stop their ripening process. Tomatoes can be ripened off the vine by wrapping them in newspaper and storing them in a cool dry place out of direct sunlight. Ethylene gas emitted by the tomatoes will help ripen them in the paper. You can also keep these for quite some time if stored in the basement or garage out of freezing temperatures. If all goes well, you can have your own garden tomatoes until Thanksgiving or Christmas if you handle them properly. When they begin showing color sit them on the window sill to finish ripening.


 Try making salsa verde with green tomatoes – especially if you have a bumper crop of tomatoes that are not ripe. <http://www.freshpreserving.com/recipes/green-tomato-salsa-verde-recipe>


Very firm green tomatoes can also be pickled. Pulling pickled tomatoes out to eat on a late winter evening with crackers and cheese is a wonderful reminder of the past season's bounty and the new season to come.


 Keep track of visitors to your garden – four-legged and winged varieties. Now is the time for migration and foraging for the winter. Note which plants attract desired animals and consider planting more of them for next year. <http://birds.audubon.org/>


 When mowing your lawn, make sure to put the mulching option on the mower. Mowing more frequently on drier days will help to reduce the need for raking leaves as they will be ground up with


the mulching mower. They will provide nutrients directly to the lawn without having to use excessive fertilizer. If there are big piles of leaves, run the mulching mower over the leaves and then use leaves as mulch on fall and winter vegetable crops or rake into borders.


 Wait at least 24 hours after heavy rain storms to mow your lawn. Mowing over wet lawns compacts soil and reduces oxygen levels from the soil up to 80%. Mowing lawns that are wet also creates hazardous conditions. Lawn mowers are more likely to slip causing injury – especially with roll overs and runaway mowers.


 Mulch around large trees to prevent late season mower damage to tree roots and trunk. Place several layers of newspaper down around the tree and cover with triple ground hardwood, wood chips, shredded leaves or compost. This technique will kill the grass below and will prevent weeds from poking through. A two to three inch layer of mulch is perfect. Make sure not to put the mulch up against the trunk – too much mulch will cause damage to the bark on the trunk. Using this organic blanket will protect the roots from severe cold temperatures. No mulch volcanoes please!!! <http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/resources/ProperMulching.pdf> For additional tree information see <http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/mulching.aspx>


 Looking for children's activities? Ask them to pick up the dreaded sweet gum balls that fall. See who can fill up a large brown bag first. Purchase some simple hay wreaths in different sizes. With parent supervision, children can hot or tacky glue the sweet gum balls on the hay wreath frames – they can be decorated for fall and winter holidays to hang or use as table décor – even to give as a teacher's gift. https://www.etsy.com/market/sweet_gum


 Pick apples and pears. If you don't grow your own fruit, now is the perfect time to take the family to a local farm for harvesting. Jarring or freezing freshly made applesauce and making pear butter will be a memorable family activity. <http://www.pickyourown.org/> You can also prepare the fruit and make pies - but freeze the freshly made pies unbaked. When the holidays approach and time is in short supply, your family and friends will appreciate the freshly baked homemade treat that is warm from the oven.


 Bring in tropical plants when the night time temperatures dip below 50 – most prefer higher night time temperatures. Waiting too long to bring them in can cause some serious setbacks in their growth. Using a garden hose, wash plants down and let them drain off before bringing indoors. You can also give them a dose of an insecticidal soap to make sure that you are not bringing in any unwanted pests.


 Cut back hardy and non-hardy banana leaves and clean. Cut the leaves in large sections removing the mid vein of the leaf. Wrap the leaves in paper towel and slip them into a large plastic bag and refrigerate. Use the leaves to wrap fish or other meats when baking, grilling or steaming. You will be amazed at the wonderful flavor the leaves add to your meal.


 Pull out pepper plants before we have a heavy frost. Clean off all peppers from the plant and clean off the roots by shaking off excess soil. Peppers can be hung upside down in a cool, well ventilated area. Repot pepper plants in fresh potting soil in late winter and place on a sunny window sill – water well. This will be the start to next year’s garden.


 Bring in geraniums and clean any faded blooms and remove any dead material. You can leave them potted to grace a sunny window sill in the winter or they can be cleaned and hang upside down in a cool, well ventilated area (same as for peppers). Geraniums can be repotted in late winter and placed in a sunny window until late spring before planting outdoors.

 Plant radishes for a late season harvest for salads and snacking. You will have a crop in 4-6 weeks. <http://www.motherearthnews.com/Organic-Gardening/2008-02-01/Growing-Radishes.aspx>

 Mark poison ivy stems now with flag markers or spray paint. It is easy to identify now because of its autumn colors which can be yellow, orange and/or red. When the plants go dormant in a month or so, remove the plant wearing disposable gloves and using a large plastic bag, pull the stems out. Turn the bag inside out after pulling the plant to contain the plant in the bag. Dispose of all contents into the trash. This process will reduce the likelihood of getting poison ivy.

 Plant arugula now. It loves the cool weather and the taste is more luscious as the weather gets cooler. <http://www.burpee.com/vegetables/arugula/all-about-arugula-article10038.html>

 Cut back seed pods that have dispersed their seed like milkweed. Rubber band the stems together into bundles and hang to dry. Cut hydrangea heads too and hang to dry or make a wreath before they are dry. They can be sprayed various colors or left natural after drying to use for holiday decorations for the Christmas tree or for a holiday wreath.

 Think ahead and plant up winter containers and have them ready to switch out when your fall containers are done their bloom. You can plant shrub dogwoods that have colorful winter stems that will look great during the cold winter months. Potted evergreens can be planted too! Check out the evergreens coming into garden centers now. Look for attractive ceramic containers and pot up a holly, spruce or fir tree for later use as a Christmas tree or outdoor decor. You can even put the lights on the tree so when the holiday approaches all you have to do is complete the decorations indoors. After the holiday the tree can be put out near the front or back door on raised feet (so the ceramic container won’t crack from the cold). The tree can be planted in the spring. A no fuss, no muss holiday option.