

NORTH COAST YARD & GARDEN

HORTICULTURAL NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE OHIO GARDENER

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IN MY GARDEN

Autumn has always been my favorite season. The weather is a lot like summer, except not so hot. The humidity is lower too, so being outdoors is very comfortable. The herbaceous annuals and perennials are at their largest, and vegetable beds are producing like crazy.

After spring, fall is the busiest time in the garden. Having a plan for your tasks helps keep you from getting overwhelmed or taken by surprise. This issue will cover the major projects for fall and give some ideas for fall color in the garden.

Goldfinches are very busy at the feeders. They start their nesting later in the year than most birds. This allows them to avoid being parasitized by cowbirds that lay eggs in other birds' nests. Since they wait until July to build a nest, there is plenty of down from thistle flower seed heads to make soft nest linings.

The black seed that they love to eat from feeders, though often called thistle, is actually nyjer seed. It is very rich in oil and gives the birds plenty of energy. Feeding birds with nyjer seed does not produce thistles as weeds in the yard. The plant that produces the seed is not a thistle, but a daisy-like yellow flower, with the scientific name *Guizotia abyssinica*, which grows in Asia and Africa. Furthermore, all nyjer seed is sterilized before it leaves its country of origin not to prevent the nyjer

from growing, but to kill any exotic weed seeds that might be mixed in.



Goldfinches are year-round residents of Ohio. They begin to molt their bright yellow plumage at this time of year and change to a drab brown similar to house finches or sparrows. Goldfinches in winter are still recognizable by their smaller beaks and by the distinctive striped pattern on their wings. They are also recognized by their calls: a high-pitched, sweet-sounding rising note, and a soft three- or four-note twittering.

If you put out nyjer seed, you are bound to attract goldfinches. House finches and house sparrows also like nyjer, and will sometimes try to chase away the smaller goldfinches. Thwart these bullies with an upside-down feeder that has the seed holes below the perches. Goldfinches are very acrobatic and can easily hang upside down to get the seed, while sparrows and larger finches cannot.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

FALL CLEANUP

Cleanup is the task everyone remembers. As leaves turn brown and plants die back, there is plenty of work to keep the garden looking good. Keep tree leaves raked up off the lawn. Some leaves in the flower beds are okay, but do not let them smother your plants. Leaves that tend to pack down and get wet and slimy, such as maple leaves, can easily rot the crowns of perennials. Leaves that stay dry and fluffy, like oak leaves, make a better insulator for over-wintering flowers.



As annuals and perennials turn brown, it is a good idea to cut them back to a few inches above the soil line. There are a few exceptions to this rule. Annuals or perennials that self-seed should be left in place, or at least have their seed heads left behind, to provide next year's seedlings. Plants that look attractive all winter, such as ornamental grasses, evergreen perennials and plants with attractive seed heads, should be left standing to provide some winter interest for the garden. Coneflowers and sunflowers can also be left standing so birds can feed on their seeds. Chrysanthemums should not be cut down until spring, since the brown leaves and branches insulate the crown of the

plant and greatly increases its chance of surviving the winter.

All these brown leaves and plants shouldn't go to waste. If you do not have a compost pile, autumn is an excellent time to start one. Simply pile the plant debris in an out of the way spot in your garden. A four-foot-square pile that is three feet tall should be able to generate enough internal heat to start the composting process. Keep your compost pile from stinking by turning it at least once a week to allow oxygen into the center of the pile. Do not add meat scraps or pet waste to the compost pile to avoid unsanitary conditions. Balance fresh, green materials like grass clippings with plenty of dried, brown material to prevent an ammonia odor. Keep any leaves or plants that were diseased out of the compost pile as well, since the disease organisms may survive in the compost and re-infect your garden in the future. By late spring the plant material will have degraded substantially, providing a free source of rich humus to improve your garden soil.

Don't forget to dig up and store your tender bulbs. Gladiolus, dahlias, cannas, caladiums, elephant ears, calla lilies and other warm-climate bulbs should be lifted out of the ground once the tops begin to turn yellow or brown. Let the bulbs dry for a day or two in a shady but airy place before brushing off the remaining dried soil. Some gardeners like to protect their bulbs from rot by dipping them in a fungicide or dusting them with sulfur. Pack the bulbs away in shredded paper or peat moss, spacing them out so they do not touch each other. Store them in paper bags or ventilated boxes – never use plastic bags, or your bulbs will rot for sure. Keep them in a cool, dry place all winter, but remember to check them periodically so that if one bulb rots it can be removed before spoiling the rest of them.

Tender houseplants that took a summer vacation on the porch or patio will need to come indoors soon. The best time to bring them in is when outdoor temperatures are similar to the indoor temperatures, or when nighttime lows reach around 50 degrees. Avoid bringing in insect pests with your houseplants by treating them with a systemic insecticide a week or two before the move. Disyston granules are an excellent choice since they will also kill any spider mites. Drench the soil with a bug killer to get rid of nuisance creatures like potato bugs, earwigs, millipedes and earthworms that may have taken up residence in the pot. This is also a good time to repot your plants with fresh new potting soil. If you rinse off all the old soil, any hitchhikers will be rinsed away as well. Thoroughly spray the plant down with insecticidal soap and let it dry immediately before the move indoors. Your plants should then be ready for their winter home.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

DIVIDING AND TRANSPLANTING

Fall is an excellent time to move plants or dig them up and divide them into several new plants. Less daylight and lower nighttime temperatures signal perennials and woody plants to slow or stop their top growth and divert energy and nutrients to the roots for winter storage. Transplanting and dividing should be done in the early fall while the soil is still warm and there is plenty of time for new roots to grow. Plants put in the ground after mid-October will not be able to set roots well, and repeated freezing and thawing of the soil is likely to heave them out of the ground and kill them. Late transplants should be mulched well once the ground freezes to protect them from frost heaving.

Plants like hosta, speedwell (*Veronica*), coneflower (*Echinacea*), blackeyed susan (*Rudbeckia*) coreopsis, salvia and ornamental grasses should be divided regularly to prevent crowding and ensure maximum blooming and performance. Give away the extra divisions to neighbors or fellow gardeners, or add them to your compost pile.

Some perennials do not take well to dividing. These plants should be divided in May when they have the whole growing season to recover. These include peonies, daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), coralbells (*Heuchera*) and false spirea (*Astilbe*).

If you would like to save a little bit of summer through the winter, or if you have the facilities to start growing next year's bedding plants, this is a good time to take cuttings of annuals to root. Geraniums, begonias, roses, coleus and many other tender plants will readily root from cuttings at this time of year. Take a three- or four-inch cutting from a growing tip, not a flower tip. Remove all but the top two leaves and dip the cut end in rooting hormone. Keep the cutting in a high-humidity environment, either in a glass of water, or in a pot that is enclosed in a plastic bag. Do not use the cutting to poke a hole in the soil; use a stick or pencil to make the hole, insert the cutting, then firm the soil closed around the stem.

Keep in mind that sun-loving plants will need as much light as you can provide throughout the winter, and the plants will not be able to be planted out until all danger of frost has passed in late May. You may find yourself with an indoor jungle by April with seven-month-old cuttings growing like crazy in the house.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

FALL IS FOR PLANTING

Since fall conditions favor root growth for better plant establishment, this is a great time to plant new trees, shrubs and perennials. It is also a time when many garden centers and nurseries have plants at reduced prices.

Autumn foliage can be more spectacular than blooms since the whole plant changes to bright colors. The table below lists trees and shrubs that are particularly colorful.

Leaf Color	Plants
Red	Sourwood (<i>Oxydendrum</i>), maples (<i>Acer</i>), oakleaf hydrangea, itea, blueberries, many viburnums, burning bush (<i>Euonymus alata</i>), chokecherry (<i>Aronia</i>), Callery pear (<i>Pyrus</i>), Virginia creeper (<i>Parthenocissus</i>)
Orange	Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier</i>), sweetgum (<i>Liquidambar</i>), smokebush (<i>Cotinus</i>), fothergilla
Yellow	Tiger Eye sumac, ginkgo, tuliptree (<i>Liriodendron</i>), birch (<i>Betula</i>), witchhazel (<i>Hamamelis</i>), summersweet (<i>Clethra</i>)

There are plenty of flowering plants that bloom in late summer and fall. Asters, Japanese anemone, joe-pye weed, goldenrod, ornamental grasses, plumbago, sedum, salvia, sweet autumn clematis and toad lily are just a few. Many summer-blooming perennials continue their show into autumn, including chelone, coreopsis, coneflower, gaillardia, black-eyed susan, hardy hibiscus, lavender, obedient plant, speedwell and yarrow. Don't forget the

classic fall flowers: chrysanthemums, pansies and violas.



Fall is also the time to plant for spring color. Hardy spring bulbs are ready for purchase and planting at your local garden center. In addition to tulips, daffodils, hyacinth and crocus, why not try some of the lesser known "minor" bulbs? Galanthus, or snowdrops are one of the first flowers to bloom – during last year's warm winter I had a snowdrop in bloom on January 1! Winter aconite is a nice yellow flower that also comes early. Chionodoxa, wood hyacinth and scilla produce sprays of pink, blue or white star-shaped flowers throughout the spring. *Fritillaria meleagris* is like a tulip that hangs its head to point downward, while *Fritillaria imperialis* (crown imperial) is one of the tallest spring blooming bulbs. Alliums, or ornamental onions, are gaining in popularity for their interesting round blooms and good deer resistance.

Get your bulbs planted by the end of October for best results. The bulb actually begins growing roots soon after it is planted, so it is best to get them in early. The rule of thumb is to plant bulbs three

times as deep as the bulb is tall, and always plant bulbs with the pointy end up.



GARDEN CALENDAR

- September is National Organic Harvest Month.
 - Plant seeds for turnips, spinach and lettuce outdoors.
 - As space is cleared out in your vegetable bed, sow cover crops of alfalfa, vetch, rye or clover to keep down weeds and provide nutrients when it is turned into the soil in spring.
 - Clean up fallen fruit regularly to avoid attracting yellowjackets and wasps.
 - When raspberry and blackberry canes have finished bearing fruit, prune those canes down to the ground. Leave non-bearing canes to fruit next year.
 - Delay pruning trees and shrubs to avoid stimulating new growth that will not have time to mature before winter.
- Remove sod and prepare the soil to create new beds to plant in the spring.
 - Fall is for planting - add some new trees or shrubs.
 - Plant pansies, chrysanthemums and ornamental kale or cabbage early this month.
 - Purchase spring-blooming bulbs such as tulips, hyacinth, crocus and daffodils to plant next month.
 - Fertilize perennials with a slow release fertilizer for the last time this year.
 - Divide and replant perennials by the month's end.
 - Take pictures or map out your flower beds so you so you remember where your perennials are next spring.
 - Apply the fourth step of lawn fertilizer.
 - Kill broadleaf weeds in the grass with a lawn weed killer.
 - Core aerate lawns with compacted soil or over 1/2 inch of thatch.
 - Sow grass seed in thin or bare areas, making sure the seed gets all the way down to the soil.
 - Collect seed from vegetables, herbs, perennials and annuals for next year.
 - Keep deadheading late-blooming perennials to keep them blooming as long as possible.



ROGER S. BOLGER HAS OVER TEN YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL HORTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE AND HAS GARDENED ALL HIS LIFE IN NORTHEAST OHIO. HE HAS GIVEN DOZENS OF GARDENING TALKS AND SPECIALIZES IN WOODY PLANTS, PERENNIALS, TURF, ENTOMOLOGY, INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT, ORGANIC GARDENING, PONDS AND BACKYARD WILDLIFE.

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