Garden Soil Preparation — It’s Not Too Late

Autumn is an excellent time to add organic materials and till garden soils. Winter can still be a good time to take care of this chore as long as the soil isn’t frozen. It is far wiser to till now than to wait until spring when cold, wet conditions can limit your ability to work soils easily. Working soil when it is wet destroys soil structure and results in hard clods that are very slow to break down. On the other hand, dry soil may need to be watered so it can be more easily tilled. Be sure to wait several days after watering to let soil moisture levels moderate. You want the soil moist; not wet nor dry, when tilling.

There is a limit to how much organic material such as leaves can be added in one application. Normally, a layer 2 inches deep is adequate with 5 to 6 inches being the maximum that can be added at one time. Shredding the material before application encourages faster and more complete decomposition due to increased surface area. Remember, soil preparation is an important key to a successful garden. (WU)

MISCELLANEOUS

Horseradish

Horseradish is ready to dig after a hard freeze kills the foliage (usually November or December). The large roots can be harvested while smaller, pencil sized roots can be cut in 6-8 inch long sections as ‘seed’ or ‘sets’ for next year’s crop which are then immediately re-planted. Another option is to leave the horseradish in the ground and dig as needed. If you choose the latter option, be sure to heavily mulch the area so that the ground doesn’t freeze.
To use horseradish, peel the large, fleshy roots and cut into sections. Use a blender or food processor to chop the roots along with a small amount of water and a couple of ice cubes. Vinegar or lemon juice is added to stop the process that produces the “bite” of horseradish. Add immediately after blending for a mild flavor or wait up to 3 minutes to give the horseradish more kick. Use 2 to 3 tablespoons of vinegar or lemon juice per cup of horseradish sauce along with ½ teaspoon of salt for flavor. Store ground horseradish in a tightly sealed jar in a refrigerator until ready for use. (WU)

**Houseplants and Indoor Pollution**

Researchers at the University of Georgia tested a number of common houseplants for their ability to remove organic volatiles from indoor environments. The indoor pollutants included benzene, toluene, octane, trichloroethylene (TCE), and alpha-pinene.

Houseplants were rated as either “superior,” “intermediate,” or “poor” to reflect their ability to remove all volatiles. None of the plants appeared to have been damaged by the volatiles.

**Superior Removal Efficiency**
- Hemigraphis alternata: Red Ivy
- Hedera helix: English Ivy
- Tradescantia pallida: Wandering Jew
- Hoya carnosa: Porcelain Flower

**Intermediate Removal Efficiency**
- Ficus benjamina: Weeping fig
- Polycia fruticosa: Ming aralia
- Fittonia argyroneura: Silver Nerve Plant
- Sansevieria trifasciata: Mother-in-Law's Tongue
- Guinaia sp.: Type of Bromeliad
- Anthurium andreanum: Flamingo Flower
- Schefflera elegantissima: False aralia

**Poor Removal Efficiency**
- Peperomia clusiifolia: Peperomia
- Chlorophytum comosum: Spider plant
- Howea belmoreana: Sentry palm
- Spathiphyllum wallisii: Peace Lily
- Schefflera arboricola: Hawaiian Elf Schefflera
- Codiaeum variegatum: Croton
- Calathea roseopicta: Peacock Plant
- Aspidistra elatior: Cast Iron Plant
Monitor Indoor Plant Temperatures

Now would be a good time to check the location of foliage houseplants to be sure the plants don't get too cold this fall or winter. Plants next to windows or in entryways near outside doors are at the greatest risk. Plants sensitive to cold temperatures include Chinese evergreen (Algaonema), flamingo flower (Anthurium), croton (Codiaeum), false aralia (Dizygotheca), and ming and balfour aralia (Polyscias). Monitor and maintain temperatures above 65 degrees F for the false aralia and above 60 degrees for the rest of the list. Many other indoor plants prefer temperatures above 50 degrees. If needed, move plants away from the windows or door entrances to reduce cold temperature exposure. It may be necessary to move some plants from windowsills before shades or drapes are pulled, especially in the evening.

(WU)

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