Video of the Week:  Will Fall Mums Last Through the Winter

FLOWERS

Fertilize Spring-Flowering Bulb Beds in October

If established bulb beds have been fertilized in the past, there is often plenty of phosphorus and potassium present in the soil. It is best to have soil tested to be sure. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 pounds per 100 square feet. This is equal to 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. It should be applied at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per square foot. Turf fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 also can be used, but the rate would have to be cut to 1 pound per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per 2 square feet. (WU)

VEGETABLES

Last Tomatoes of the Season

Cold nights are increasing in frequency, hinting at frosts yet to come. If you have tomatoes, you may have some that are approaching maturity. Leave them on the vine until mature or until a frost is forecast. Tomatoes will ripen off the vine but must have reached a certain phase of maturity called the ‘mature green stage.’ These tomatoes are mature enough to harvest but not yet red. Look for full-sized tomatoes with a white, star-shaped zone at the bottom end of the fruit.
When harvesting fruit before a frost, separate tomatoes into three groups for storage: those that are mostly red, those that are just starting to turn, and those that are still green. Discard tomatoes with defects such as rots or breaks in the skin. Place the tomatoes on cardboard trays or cartons but use layers of newspaper to separate fruit if stacked. Occasionally a tomato may start to rot and leak juice. The newspaper will keep the juice from contacting nearby or underlying fruit. Store groups of tomatoes at as close to 55 degrees as possible until needed. (WU)

**ORNAMENTALS**

Questions on Ornamental Grasses

We are starting to receive questions on whether it is best to cut back ornamental grasses in the fall or spring. As a rule, ornamental grasses should not be cut back while green because they need time to move the energy found in the foliage into the roots. Even when browned by cold weather, most gardeners leave the foliage until spring because of the interest it adds to winter landscapes. Early March is the preferred time to cut back these plants. Dry foliage is extremely flammable and should be removed in the fall from areas where it is a fire hazard.

Another frequent question is whether to divide ornamental grasses in the fall. Spring is the preferred time because divisions planted in the fall may not root well enough to survive the winter. (WU)

**MISCELLANEOUS**

Harvesting and Curing Black Walnut

Black walnuts are ready to be harvested when the hull can be dented with your thumb. You can also wait until the nuts start falling from the tree. Either way it is important to hull walnuts. If not removed, the hull will leach a stain through the nut and into the meat during storage. The stain not only discolors the meats but gives them an off flavor.

Hull walnuts by running them through a corn sheller or pounding each nut through a hole in a board. The hole must be big enough for the nut but smaller than the hull. You may also hull walnuts by placing them on the ground and running over them with a vehicle. Note that the juice from the hulls will stain concrete, so it may be wise to place them on compacted ground or a gravel driveway. Do not handle nuts without gloves.
because the material that stains concrete will also stain your hands.

Wash hulled nuts by spreading them out on the lawn or on a wire mesh. Spray them with water or place them in a tub of water. If you place them in a tub, the good nuts should sink. Those that float are probably not well-filled with kernels. Next, dry the nuts by spreading them in layers no more than three deep in a cool, shady and dry place such as a garage or tool shed. Curing normally takes two weeks.

Cracking walnuts can be a challenge. The cheapest method is to use a hammer or vise. Nutcrackers, though expensive, make this job much quicker, safer, and easier. Most nutcrackers are not sturdy enough for black walnuts. Several of those that are able to crack black walnuts with ease are described on the Indiana Nut Growers Association website at http://www.nutgrowers.org/QA/nutcrackers.htm (WU)

**Work Garden Soil in the Fall**

Insects often hide in garden debris. If that debris is worked into the soil, insects will be less likely to survive the winter. Diseases are also less likely to overwinter if old plants are worked under. Also, garden debris will increase the organic matter content of the soil. Working the debris into the soil is easier if you mow the old vegetable plants several times to reduce the size of the debris.

Fall is an excellent time to add organic matter. Not only are organic materials usually more available in the fall (leaves, rotten hay or silage, grass clippings) but fresher materials can be added in the fall than in the spring because there is more time for them to break down before planting. As a general rule, add 2 inches of organic material to the surface of the soil and till it in. Be careful not to over till. You should end up with particles the size of grape nuts or larger. If you work garden soil into the consistency of dust, you have destroyed the soil structure. (WU)

**Amending Soils with Sand**

Sand is sometimes suggested as an amendment material for clay soils. However, there is good reason to be cautious about using sand. In order for sand to be effective in breaking up a clay soil, sand grains must touch one another so there are pore spaces between grains that can hold air and/or water. If the grains do not touch, the clay fills in all the voids between the sand particles,
leaving no room for pores. This is the same principle used to make concrete, and the result is somewhat the same. You end up making a bad situation worse.

So how much sand does it take for it to be effective? Normally, about 80 percent sand is sufficient. In most cases this makes the use of sand impractical. The addition of organic matter is a much better choice. (WU)

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