Horticulture 2012 Newsletter  
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Video of the Week:  Will Fall Mums Last Through the Winter

TURFGRASS

Apply Late-Season Nitrogen Application in November

November is the time to give cool-season lawns the last nitrogen application of the season. Why November? Because while top growth slows in response to cool temperatures, grass plants are still making food (carbohydrates) by photosynthesis. A November nitrogen application helps boost the photosynthesis rate. Carbohydrates that are not used in growth are stored in the crown and other storage tissues in the plant. These carbohydrate reserves help the turfgrass green up earlier in the spring and sustain growth into May without the need for early-spring (March or April) nitrogen. Those early-spring nitrogen applications are less desirable because they can lead to excessive shoot growth and reduced root growth. Other benefits of November-applied nitrogen for cool-season grasses include improved winter hardiness, root growth and shoot density.

How much should you apply? One to 1 ½ pounds actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. of lawn area is sufficient. In order for this application to be effective, the nitrogen must be readily available to the plant, because the growing season is nearly over. Therefore, for a November application, use a soluble (quickly-available) nitrogen carrier such as urea or ammonium sulfate. Many turfgrass fertilizers sold in garden centers and other retail outlets also contain soluble nitrogen. Avoid products that contain water-insoluble nitrogen (slow-release) for this application. As always, sweep up any fertilizer that gets on driveways, sidewalks, or streets and reapply it to the lawn. (WU)
FLOWERS

Perennial Garden Clean-up

Fall is traditionally a time for cleaning up gardens. Normally, we recommend clear-cutting dead stems to help control insect and disease problems. With herbaceous perennials that have been pest free, you might want to consider leaving some to provide structure, form, and color to the winter garden. For example, ornamental grasses can be attractive even during the winter months. But those near structures should be cut to the ground because they can be a fire hazard. Perennials with evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage can provide color. Of course, some perennials are naturally messy after dormancy and should be cut back in the fall.

Foliage can be left for other reasons. For example, foliage left on marginally hardy plants such as tender ferns helps ensure overwintering of plant crowns. Also, seed heads on some perennial plants can provide seed for birds. (WU)

There is Still Time to Plant Spring-Flowering Bulbs

Generally, it is recommended to plant hardy bulbs (especially daffodils) in October to give them enough time to root before winter. But it is certainly not too late to plant them now. As long as the soil temperatures are above 40 degrees F, the bulbs should continue root development. You can find the previous week’s soil temperature readings for areas across the state from our Weather Data Library at http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/wdl/Text%20files/text/REPORT.TXT

Although many of the best bulbs have probably already been purchased, garden centers may still have a good selection. Be sure to select large, firm bulbs that have not begun to sprout.

While many bulbs can adapt to a wide range of soil types, none can tolerate poorly drained soil. Prepare the planting bed by adding organic matter such as peat moss, well-rotted manure, or compost and mix into the soil.

Adequate fertility is essential. It is best to rely on a soil test to determine what nutrients are needed. Garden soils that have been fertilized regularly in the past may have excess levels of phosphorus. Excess phosphorus can interfere with the uptake of other essential micronutrients. In such cases, it would be better to use a fertilizer relatively high in nitrogen such as a 29-5-4, 27-3-3, or something similar. Apply these fertilizers at the rate of 2/3 pound per 100 square feet.
In the absence of a soil test, or if phosphorus is needed, add a low analysis, balanced fertilizer such as 5-10-5 or 6-10-4 at the rate of 2 to 3 pounds per 100 square feet of bed. Mix all amendments thoroughly with the soil before planting the bulbs.

The size and species of the bulb determines how deep to plant. In general, the depth to the bottom of the bulb should be about 2 to 3 times the size of the bulb, but check the planting instructions specific to each particular flower. (WU)

**VEGETABLES**

**Hardiness of Cool-Season Vegetables**

Cool-season vegetables are cold tolerant, though some are able to take colder temperatures than others.

Semi-hardy crops can take a light frost but are damaged by temperatures in the mid- to upper-20s. Examples include beets, Chinese cabbage, collards, Irish potatoes, Bibb lettuce, mustard, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, and leaf lettuce. Covering these plants when cold weather threatens can help extend the harvest season.

Plants termed “hardy” can take lower temperatures but are damaged when the temperature drops to the low 20s. These include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, carrots, turnips, and kale.

Certain root crops can essentially be stored outside even after the leaves have been damaged or killed by frost. Beets, carrots, potatoes and turnips can be mulched and harvested as needed until the soil starts to freeze in late November to December.

Growing vegetables in Kansas can be a challenge, but we have an extremely long gardening season. We can harvest from early April (asparagus) to early December. Winter is a good time to plan and prepare for next year’s crops. (WU)

**ORNAMENTALS**

**Pruning Trees and Shrubs in the Fall**

Though light pruning and removal of dead wood are fine this time of year, more severe pruning should be left until spring. Consider pruning to be “light” if 10% of less of the plant is removed. Dead wood does not count in this calculation.

Keep in mind that even light pruning of spring-blooming shrubs such as lilac and forsythia will reduce flowers for next year. We normally recommend that spring-bloomers be pruned after flowering.

Shrubs differ in how severely they can be cut
back. Junipers do not break bud from within the plant and therefore should be trimmed lightly if you wish to keep the full shape. Overgrown junipers should be removed. On the other hand, there are certain shrubs that can be pruned back severely during the spring. Rejuvenation is the most severe type of pruning and may be used on multi-stem shrubs that have become too large with too many old branches to justify saving the younger canes. All stems are cut back to 3- to 5-inch stubs. This works well for spirea, forsythia, pyracantha, ninebark, Russian almond, little leaf mock orange, shrub roses, and flowering quince. Just remember that spring is the correct time to do this, not now. (WU)

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