



Gardening with Acer

October - November - December

2026

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Yes, by anybody's standards, it was a difficult summer! Early and prolonged heat, humidity, drought, violent rain and wind storms ... it's never easy being a Connecticut gardener! But the gardening year is a circle and each season brings something to be treasured. The sunny, still days and cooler nights of early autumn are a special gift as we wait for the flaming colors of fall to light our way to the winter to come. After all, people arrive from all over the world to admire the fiery seasonal beauty we take for granted.

New England gardeners learn to go with the flow. Our ground stays warm until almost Thanksgiving and the temperature cool-down is gradual. Sunny days and cooler nights keep the dew on the grass well into the morning and make gardening a pleasure. Indian Summer traditionally only occurs when warm days come after a killing frost ... and that occurs anywhere from mid-October to mid-November. It's Mother Nature's last gift to us before we bed down for the winter.

Many perennials really go dormant on their own schedule and your main role is to tidy up, cutting things back in late October and November. Do not cut back plants too early as it could produce a sudden spurt of new growth. Wait until the plant's leaves are yellow or brown and, as long as no disease is present, remove everything to the compost pile, layering in some fallen leaves. It is actually easier to remove the leaves on daylilies in the spring when only a gentle tug will be needed but you can take away their dead leaves in the fall. Snow is still the best insulator around so don't worry if you leave some plants standing.

It's also a good time to reflect on the garden year now ending. What went well, what didn't? What new plants would you like to try? What plants no longer fit in? Are some of your flowering bushes over-grown? Does your basic garden plan still work for your current life style? Nature never sits still and our gardens change too. Fall is the perfect time to adapt the garden to a new design that better suits the way you choose to garden now.

A general guide, **Putting Your Garden to Bed for the Winter**, is available on the web site.

Reminder

Our goal is always to make the Newsletter easier for you to work with and to enjoy! To do that, we will now use the Newsletter for gardening help and general information and use email and the web site to give you quick updates on sales, workshops and other on-going events (including our popular videos) ... please get in the habit of checking both on a regular basis. We expect to add new material to the web site regularly... our Information Handouts currently include many sheets on Plants, Seasonal, How To's and Garden Challenges. By all means let us know, by email, what you'd like to see covered. We get some terrific ideas from our customers!

The Plant of the Month will be available at the nursery from the first of each month on and will be announced and described on the web site. These plants are carefully chosen to showcase current bloom and are featured at the nursery from April through October. The web site will keep you current!

Be sure to check the web site for our upcoming Holiday Workshops.

Gift Cards/Garden Gifts

Are you looking for that special birthday or anniversary present? Do you need to say “thank you for a wonderful visit” or let someone know just how much you appreciate what they’ve done? Acer Gardens Gift Cards are the ideal answer and are available either online or at the Nursery. A Gift Card can bring many hours of enjoyment and make your life easier at the same time!

Christmas isn’t that far away! What gardener wouldn’t like to find a new pair of garden gloves tucked into their stocking or replacement tools for all the trowels/pruners we lost/mis-placed this summer. Specialty houseplant aids are always appreciated. A brand new pair of Felco pruners will bring a smile to a gardener’s face! Bulbs for forcing are the gift that keeps on giving! What about a new houseplant container to brighten winter days? We will also have pre-planted paper whites, amaryllis and Christmas cactus available. Let us help you celebrate the arrival of winter by making somebody’s holidays merry and bright!

Late-Season Color/Garden Stars

Here in lower Connecticut, our fall weather allows our gardens to give us a final bonus to the gardening season ... the fall garden stars. They rest quietly all summer long and then spring a final surprise on the weary gardener: the last glorious flowers of the year!

Anemone japonica

These elegant, late-blooming plants look best planted against a background which will show- case their white or clear pink blooms as they rise and float above mounded deep-green foliage. In bloom through October, their long stems help make long-lasting cut flowers. They thrive in light shade but can handle morning sun. Happy in humus-rich soil, they should be mulched over the winter.

Asters

Available in an incredible range of colors, asters bring zest to a fall garden. Their long period of bloom (late summer through fall) and wide height range makes them invaluable in a mixed bed. Mingling well with other fall perennials, asters establish themselves easily, thrive in average soil and will take sun to partial shade. Some bloom in clouds of pale flowers; others flaunt deep shades of purple. All combine well with native plants and will reward you with steady growth. (Cutting the plants back in early June will prevent “aster sprawl”.) Cut asters back after the foliage has died. Divide every 3-5 years (in early spring) to keep the plants under control; remove unwanted seedlings as you spot them.

Dendranthemum

This is the true perennial mum. Mid-sized, they require no special care all summer long and then, suddenly, in fall they produce a loose mass of daisy-like flowers in a wide variety of colors ranging through shades of pink to apricot and pale yellow. Most of them spread so give them lots of room and air and plant in well-drained soil. It’s a good idea to cut the plants back a little in June to keep them from getting out of control in their exuberance!

Montauk Daisy

This daisy-like plant with its white flowers and deep green, shiny foliage, will bloom well into fall. Established plants have a real presence in the fall garden with their long stalks, are highly attractive to butterflies and bees and are considered both salt and drought tolerant. Montauks will thrive in full sun to partial shade and should be cut back in early summer to keep growth more contained. Regular dead-heading will generate maximum bloom. Divide the clumps every 2-3 years to maintain vigor.

Sedums

Sedums, also known as stonecrop, come in many different varieties and sizes, blooming across many months and adding a zing of color to the late garden. They are perfect for New England: cold hardy, easy to care for and a great favorite of our native pollinators. Basically, sedum comes in low-growing or upright forms. Some sedums spread along the ground, thriving in rock gardens; others form tall, upright clumps, blooming late in the season with flowers lasting 4 weeks or more. Most do best in full sun in well-draining soil. Once established, sedums require little care. Water sparingly if needed and cut back the plants to maintain their shape after bloom. Many gardeners leave the flowers alone to form attractive seed heads.

Planting/Dividing/Moving in the Fall

Fall planting is a great time to get a jump on the next season and to plan for fuller and longer bloom periods in the garden ... it is the perfect time to plant or transplant most perennials, shrubs and trees. The combination of warm soil and reasonably dependent rain leads to good root growth and will give your new plantings a strong head start. In fact, fall planted perennials develop larger, better-established root systems and start to make quicker growth in the spring. Plants with the head start of fall planting actually appear to adapt better to summer heat.

The nice thing about fall planting is that it takes place over a longer period of time, without the frenzy and urgency of spring planting. How do you know when to start? Of course, it depends on what you're planting (perennials first, bulbs last, trees and bushes in-between) but nature provides subtle signs. Some gardeners wait for nighttime temperatures to get down around 50°. Others wait for the hummingbirds and crickets to leave and the squirrels to start hoarding acorns or for the foliage to take center stage. Fall planting time is definitely here the first time you smell wood smoke or notice reddening rose hips you missed when you deadheaded the climbers. You can usually plant into November. It's a wonderful time in the gardener's year!

All early-spring blooming perennials should be planted in the fall including phlox subulata (creeping phlox), iberis (candytuft), hellebore (Lenten rose), primulas and pulmonaria. The sooner you get them in, the quicker they will settle and be ready to grow in the spring.

Now is a good time for you to identify current "gaps" in your flower beds and add something to extend the season. The nursery has many fall-blooming perennials available, such as Japanese anemones, sedum, boltonia, cimicifuga, dendranthema, asters, eupatorium, liriope, kirengeshoma and ornamental grasses. The fall is also a good time to consider adding a few native plants. Many natives have an "open" look to their growth habit which blends particularly well with perennials currently in bloom and their sun/shade requirements are very adaptable. Think about adding New England aster, coneflower, cardinal flower, bee balm, tradescantia, persicaria or spiranthes.

Fall is the ideal time to divide or move those perennials which tend to form large clumps. The soil is warm and the new divisions will have time to form a strong root system before winter. Water the new plants well as we head into winter.

Daylilies

Daylilies are adaptable and tough, requiring very little on-going maintenance and care but they will produce their best blooms if they are routinely divided every 3-5 years. Division is good for the plants and an easy way to expand your plantings. Use a garden fork to lift the clump from the ground. Pull the clump apart, discarding the center. A really large clump can be divided and then re-divided if necessary. Replant the divisions and keep well watered until the new daylilies settle in.

Hostas

With a sharp spade, cut around the outside of the Hosta clump. Disturbing the roots as little as possible, pry and lift the entire clump out of the ground. With the spade, hack off smaller chunks, no smaller than 5" in diameter. Replant the divisions at the same depth as the original clump was growing. Water well, but do not fertilize. Mulch lightly.

Bearded Iris

Bearded Iris should be divided every 2-3 years to keep them blooming freely and to reduce the incidence of disease. Dig all around the plant and gently lift it out and shake off the loose soil.

Cut the foliage to 6" to help prevent water loss. Inspect the plant for iris borers and remove any trace of disease. Separate the individual rhizomes ... don't break them apart but make clean cuts to divide the plant into new sections.

In a full sun location, dig shallow holes for the new plants and make a 2-3" mound of dirt in the center. Place the rhizomes in the hole, spreading the roots down the mound of dirt, cover with soil and firm the dirt. Water well weekly until the new plant is established and making new leaves.

Put Your Leaves to Work for You

Green leaves are part and parcel of your garden ... but there comes a time in the fall and you look up and there they are: EVERY WHERE AND BROWN! In other words, they have a severe location problem! You do have options on how you use them: Mulch, soil amendment, or composting.

In the early days of fall, running the lawn mower through the leaves on the lawn is an easy way to produce a versatile mulch. The resulting mulch will help retain water, suppress weeds and slowly contribute to the organic matter in the underlying soil. You can save work by leaving leaves whole under some shrubs like hydrangeas and rhododendrons which will protect those shallow-rooted bushes from extreme winter cold.

If you don't have a lawn mower to use for mulching your leaves you may not need to shred them at all. It takes a little longer for whole leaves to break down than shredded leaves but you can add whole leaves to your compost. In a matter of months the leaves will break down into rich, dark fertilizer. Adding grass clippings or green leaves to the compost will encourage the leaves to break down quickly. In the spring, you will be able to add the resulting compost to your garden soil.

Spruce Up Fall and Winter Containers

Mums are not the only seasonal choice for replanting tired-looking containers. If the container is completely winter proof, perennial grasses can be planted and will provide a refuge for birds as well as decorating the landscape. Adding gourds will give an autumnal touch. Heucheras, euphorbias and ivy can be combined for a new look. Cabbages can provide a splash with their beautiful leaves and pansies will add a cheerful note. Window boxes can be re-planted to brighten the winter landscape. Use small cultivars of boxwood, cypress or euphorbia to establish a fresh look and tuck in a few pansies. Pansies are remarkably resilient and may surprise you by reappearing early in spring

Container plantings for fall rely heavily on using the colors of fall foliage as a way to extend the season. Come to the nursery and see how many choices are waiting on the benches! Once your containers are planted, stop applying liquid fertilizer which might encourage too much new growth. Keep watering the containers until the soil freezes.

Some of the newer dwarf-shrubs, especially the Alberta spruces, can be placed into containers for the winter and then transplanted to the garden in the spring. Be sure your container can withstand frost and dropping temperatures. Back them with colored stems for a little punch or use branches with berries, adding cut evergreens and pine cones as the holidays approach. Place the winter containers where they can be seen from the house as a way to connect the outside landscape to the inside.

Often-Asked Questions

What's the best way to store my tender bulbs through the winter – the garage is so cold!

After a frost, cut off the leaves and dig up dahlias, gladioli, cannas, caladiums, colocasia (Elephant Ears) and acidanthera. Do not wait for these tubers/bulbs to freeze before you dig them up. Clean off the soil (do not wash) and store the roots on their side in vermiculite or the cedar shavings used at the bottom of gerbil cages. They do well stored in boxes in the basement, protected from temperature extremes and dampness. Label by type and color. If mice routinely get into your cellar, ask your supermarket produce manager for an empty fine-meshed red onion bag. Line the bag with several layers of newspaper, add the cedar chips and layer the bulbs/tubers in. Pull the bag closed, label by type and color, and hang high on a hook in the cellar.

Home-grown garlic is so good ... when do I plant it?

Now is the time to plant both hardneck and softneck garlic. Pick a new area in the vegetable garden with fertile, well-drained soil. Take the garlic cloves apart and plant 4-6" apart 1 ½-2" deep. Mulch lightly with straw. The garlic will start to grow now. In the spring, you will see more growth and the bud will form scapes. Cut that stalk off ... it's delicious sautéed. After the foliage yellows and browns in midsummer you can start to harvest and dry the garlic. Store the garlic in bunches in a cool location. The nursery has several different kinds of garlic bulbs available ... all will do well in this climate.

I intend to plant Alliums this fall for the first time. Any advice?

The key to growing terrific alliums (and giving flower beds a long-lasting "WOW" factor in early summer) is choosing the right location! Alliums are happiest planted in soil that stays dry. If your soil does not drain quickly, add a little sand to the soil around the alliums. After planting, sprinkle on some Bulb Tone and give the bulbs a handful of the mixture in the summer when the blooms have faded. Alliums should be planted at a depth 3 times the diameter of the bulb (a 2" bulb is planted 6" deep). Pinch the faded bloom head off before it has a chance to set seed but leave the foliage and stem to feed the bulb for next year's flowers. In general, alliums are slow to multiply but if you find that you have a large clump with foliage but no flowers, lift, divide and reset.

I love the idea of a fall garden but I don't have much room available ... how can I get "the look" without giving up too much space?

The easiest way to get a big fall impact in limited space is to focus your autumn plantings in one area ... a garden entrance is ideal. It should be visible, if possible, from the house so that you can enjoy the seasonal change too! Ornamental grasses are often used as the backbone of fall gardens. They are at their showiest in fall and their presence is striking. Leave the grasses standing all through the winter for the birds to enjoy. Round, flat flowers will contrast nicely with the grasses: sedums, anemones and heucherella are ideal and the color choice is huge.

This busy gardener relaxes with her house plants all winter long. How do I make sure they come inside with a good start to their winter?

By the middle of October, your houseplants should all be back in the house after their summer outdoors. Inspect the plants carefully before you bring them in and treat for any bugs or pests. Cut back or prune the plant if necessary and re-pot with fresh soil. Spray with Neem or another horticultural oil before you bring them inside. Grouping plants together in the house is an easy way to generate humidity (especially if all the plants are on a water-filled humidity tray) and to showcase diverse foliage and plant forms. Fertilize the houseplants lightly every 2 weeks all winter long.

I never know if I should mulch for the winter or not. I don't want to give protection to rodents and gnawers but the ground looks so bare!

In areas without reliable snow cover, such as south-eastern Connecticut, mulch can be very useful but it's a good idea to wait until the ground is frozen hard before applying it. You can use straw, or evergreen boughs, but avoid using leaves or grass clippings. The mulch should be removed after the first serious thaw (don't fall for that fake February thaw), whenever it comes.

I love the look of little bulbs but I never know how close to each other I can plant them. Is there a rule-of-thumb?

Here's an easy table to refer to ... with the number of bulbs you can plant per square foot.

Chionodoxa	8 – 10	Greek windflower	10-15
Crocus	10-15	Hyacinth	4-6
Grape hyacinth	10-15	Siberian squill	9-12
Daffodils	4-5	Tulips	4-5

We love the look of evergreens in the winter! Can we plant some now?

Fall is the perfect evergreen planting time. If they are visible from the house, evergreens can add a strong vertical accent to the landscape and give you "green" to look at through the dreary days of winter. Firs, Pines and Cypress offer a wide range of color shades, shapes and sizes to choose from. They also provide a level of privacy which deciduous trees and bushes cannot offer. Because the air is cooler in the fall, but the soil is still warm, freshly planted evergreens have a more friendly setting in which to establish themselves. Moisture is slower to evaporate. Give your new evergreen 1" of water a week until the ground freezes.

What can I do in the garden to get a head start on Spring? It all seems so overwhelming! Is there such a thing as a Bare Bones List?

Yes, there is a Bare Bones List: Cut down and remove the dead stuff, prune off obvious deadwood from bushes, rake off the leaves, add compost, apply deer repellents and edge the beds. Just add in the extras that apply to your garden!

Putting the Garden to Bed

Healthy plants are more likely to survive winter unscathed. Start your winter protection routine in autumn. Stop fertilizing plants 6 weeks before the first fall frost to help plants harden off. Water thoroughly until the ground freezes.

Perennials

Most plants need to be cut back after heavy, killing frosts to prevent disease and pest problems in the spring but doing this too early can deprive roots of gaining energy from the fading leaves. Any diseased or bug-infested leaves should be bagged and put in the garbage, not the compost pile. Compost is a soil conditioner, not a fertilizer, so apply it now to get a jump on spring. Do a final weeding. Edge your beds and start the next gardening year looking neat and tidy. A light winter mulch will help keep the soil temperature even. Waiting until the ground is frozen to apply mulch will discourage rodents from making nests and building condos.

Hostas are very low on the fall maintenance scale! After a hard frost, cut the entire plant back to the ground. (Removing the dead leaves will discourage slugs.) Don't compost the dead leaves as you could spread disease. Light mulch (only an inch or two) will discourage pests and protect the root system. Hostas can be divided in the fall before the first frost. Each new plant should be watered well but not fertilized until early spring.

Shade Plants

If your ferns are growing in a natural, woodland setting, you can leave the dying fronds in place. They will decompose naturally and the new fronds will be able to easily push up through the spent foliage in the spring. The spent fronds will protect the fern's crown throughout the winter and you can tidy up the plant in the spring. Some gardeners wait to tidy up ferns in the spring until the deer have lost interest in new fronds.

Evergreens

Evergreens need to be well-watered before the start of winter but not fertilized. Do not cut back your evergreens in the fall. If an evergreen has really exceeded its limits, take a few cuttings for Christmas decorations. A late November application of an anti-transparent (such as Wilt-Stop) will help to protect your evergreens from winter desiccation and can also be sprayed on hydrangeas and Japanese maples. For best results, re-apply after a warm winter period in mid-February.

Acer Gardens' **Fall Garden Checklist** is available on the web page to help you organize your cleanup.

The Vegetable Garden

Leave carrots, leeks, parsnips, radishes, beets and turnips in the garden so that you can harvest them through the fall. When you harvest your onions, let them dry outside in the sun for a few days before cleaning them and bringing them inside for storage. When its foliage turns yellow, dig up potato plants. The potato vine can act as the host to late tomato blight so be careful to discard all parts of the potato plant. After a killing frost, pull up tomato, squash and bean plants.

Clean out the vegetable garden. Remove all old plants and fruits (roots, leaves and stems) but do not put them in the compost bin ... burn or put in garbage bags to help prevent the spread of disease and insects. Double dig the empty bed and add compost to be ready for early spring plantings. Cover your strawberries lightly with straw not hay (which harbors weeds). Remember to make a chart of the layout of your vegetable bed so that you can rotate the crops next spring. Re-assess your plantings to decide if you grew the right "mix" for your family's eating habits, bearing in mind that it wasn't the easiest of summers to cope with!

Think about ways to expand next year's vegetable garden by re-arranging space. More abundant harvests are possible by not planting just in rows. Peas, cucumbers and tomatoes can all be grown on stakes or trellises as long as you allow for the weight of the mature plant. (The A-Frame works particularly well for cucumbers and peas.) Many new varieties of vegetables have been developed recently to accommodate gardeners who grow vegetables in containers on the patio. Small-sized vegetables currently available include bush cucumbers, peppers and many patio tomatoes but new cultivars arrive every year!

Plan Now for the Coming Holidays

Wreaths, containers, bows, arrangements, mixed greens and assorted decorations (all weather-proof) will be available at the nursery starting in early November. Gift certificates are available at the nursery and on-line but we have many other Holiday gift options available at the nursery. Pre-potted paperwhites in pebbles will be available ... just take them home and water them to start them growing! We also have many indoor house plants available to keep your gardening spirits up all through winter!

Specialty poinsettias in unusual colors and shapes are real attention getters. Amaryllis will be planted (in different stages of development) and ready to go. Consult with us well in advance if you have something special in mind ... there's a wealth of dried material and decoration available to truly personalize your gift. We love to work with you to bring that holiday glow to your home and to make your presents really special!

Poinsettia

Some poinsettias can remain in bloom for 2-6 months! They prefer a day temperature of 67 degrees, hate drafts and like a humid environment and the bright, indirect light of an east window. Our poinsettias will be ready for sale just before Thanksgiving.

Amaryllis

Acer has a remarkable selection of amaryllis bulbs available this year, including a wide selection of unusual shapes and color combinations in # 1 size for you to plant in your own containers. Allow 8-12 weeks from potting to bloom and start them at 10 day intervals so that you will have flowers all winter long. Plant one bulb, firmly, to a pot and place in indirect sunlight at room temperature. (Be sure to place a saucer under the pot.) Water after potting and then only when the soil is dry to the touch. Do not mist.

As the flowers fade, cut off the entire stalk. You may get lucky and get another bloom! Amaryllis should spend the summer outdoors in the sun. Around Labor Day, stop any watering, cut off the leaves and store the bulbs in their pots in the cellar, away from any sun. Do not water them until you are ready to start the forcing cycle again.

Christmas Cactus

This cactus doesn't come from the desert but from the rainforests of southern Brazil ... it therefore prefers more humid conditions. Available in 8 different shades, including rosy red and pink, it is fairly easy to grow as long as you satisfy its basic needs. Place it in bright, indirect light and water when the top soil feels dry. The plants prefer to be in the dark at night in the weeks before they flower but they don't like to get too chilly (between 60 and 70 degrees is about right). Fertilize lightly every 2-3 weeks.

Last Chores

Clean out the bird feeders and prepare them for the coming season. Store bird seed in metal garbage cans with tight-fitting lids to discourage access by mice.

Empty containers, clean and place in the garage. Some alpine troughs (Hypertufa) can be left out if placed near the house but stone planters are not winter-proof and should be stored in the garage.

Clean out the wheelbarrow and discard any damaged garden gloves/tools. Clean and sharpen garden tools. Leave everything tidy on the garden shelves. Some gardeners claim an open jar (or small Ziploc bag) of dried mint leaves left near the house entrance from the garage helps to discourage mice from entering.

Drain and store the hoses. Turn off all outside water faucets. Hardware stores are now carrying simple snap-on winter covers for outside faucets and they are very effective.

Remember to store Wilt-Stop, insecticides, fungicides and other “goosey” products in the laundry room or a frost-free cellar. Granular fertilizer and seeds can be safely stored in the garage.

Start to apply deer repellents now. Creatures of habit, deer quickly get used to certain scents and are lazy about changing established routes so it's a good idea to change repellents often.

Winters can be long in New England. Look ahead and think about planning a day trip to the CT Flower Show in Hartford. The annual CT Garden Show will take place from Thursday, February 18 through Sunday, February 21, 2027 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. with a theme of “Where Creativity, Nature and Artistry Flourish!”. There will be over 300 vendor booths, exhibits and acres of large-scale landscaped gardens as well as demonstrations (which are free with your ticket.) This year, live music is a new feature of the show! Go to www.ctflowershow.com for further information, ticket availability and seminar listings. What a great way to get ready for spring!

General Reminder

Acer Gardens will close on 12/20 and, weather permitting, will re-open on March 24, 2027. Check the web site for the exact date as we get closer to the end of winter!

Acer Gardens
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