



October, November, December 2022

Vol. 17, No. 4

447 Winthrop Road, Deep River, Ct. 06417
(860) 526-9056 www.acergardens.com
email – acer@acergardens.com

One of the things New England gardeners learn to do is to say goodbye to disappointments! Late start this spring? Too hot and humid this summer? Too many days spent wishing, wishing hard, for rain? Too many bugs and mosquitoes? Chipmunks eating everything in sight? Too many plants which didn't reach full potential or which flowered late? Too many plants which never really flowered at all? On to the next season!

As those hot, humid days persisted into early September this year, didn't you find yourself thinking about crisper days, seasonal foods and pastries; did you look up at the sky and wish you could foretell the weather from the shape of cloud formations; did you start to plan your bulb plantings; did you look forward to the first fresh, native apples? It's a new season so look at your garden in a new way and remember: New England gardeners learn to go with the flow!

This summer we all recognized Mother Nature's insistence on doing things her own way in her own time! We all know who's really in charge! Now, without the heat and humidity, planting, dividing and general maintenance in the garden becomes a pleasure. 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.

As the gardening days begin to wind down, there is something very comforting about repeating the annual ritual of putting the garden to bed. It takes place over many weeks without the urgency and pace of spring gardening and allows us the time to savor these last golden days and to take our time over the chores.

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? 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.

Leaving your garden neat and tidy will pay huge dividends in the spring and give you a jump start on the next season. 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.

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

Gift Cards and 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 and specialty houseplant aids? Bulbs for forcing are always the gift that keeps on giving! Let us help you make your holidays merry and bright!

Web Site

Our web site is a great resource for current information including all of this year’s Newsletters (and last year’s too) and our Information Handouts which include sheets on Plants, Seasonal, How To’s and Challenges. Take a few minutes to browse through them and print out some easy reading! And please feel free to send us an email letting us know what else you’d like to see on the web site. Acer Gardens wants our web site to be your on-going interactive friend!

Upcoming Workshop

As the holidays approach, Acer Gardens will once again hold its popular Holiday Decorating Workshops, concentrating on decorating containers and wreaths for both indoors and outdoors. Learn how to bring the beauty of the season into your home and add your own touches to this festive holiday time! Multiple sessions will be held in a greenhouse. Available spaces will be limited but an Email announcement will be sent out 2 weeks before the scheduled workshops so that you will have time to sign-up in advance and reserve your place. This is a wonderful way to start the holiday season rolling!

Acer Gardens also schedules private club/association or company workshops throughout the year on specifically chosen topics. Have your club give us a call and let’s plan something for the coming year.

Plan Ahead for the Holidays

Holiday Flowers, Wreaths and Containers

Wreaths, containers, bows, arrangements, mixed greens and assorted decorations (all weather-proof) will be available at the nursery starting the week before Thanksgiving. Gift certificates are available at the nursery and on our on-line store but we have many other Holiday gift options available.

Specialty poinsettias in unusual colors and shapes are real attention getters. Amaryllis are 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!

Christmas Trees

Fresh-cut only a few days before Thanksgiving, Douglas and Fraser Fir Christmas trees will be available at the nursery . They can be pre-ordered on the on-line store; local delivery is available, for a fee. This year, it's definitely a good idea to place your order early.

The Plant of the Month

The plant of the Month is available at the nursery checkout table from the first of each month on. These plants are carefully chosen to showcase current bloom and are featured at the nursery from April through October.

October: **Solidago (Goldenrod)**

Zone: 3-9 Height: 4 – 5' Spread: 4-5'

Many people blame Goldenrod for seasonal hay fever but Ragweed, not Goldenrod, is the real hay fever culprit ... they bloom at the same time, hence the confusion! The explosion of late color that comes with Solidago is irresistible to the last butterflies and bees and can be the mainstay of a late-season, low-maintenance casual garden. The current interest in meadow gardens plays to Solidago's strengths as it combines well with Asters, Sedums, and ornamental grasses. Tolerant of light shade, Solidago is self-seeding and prefers moist conditions but has proven to be fairly resistant to drought conditions.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

Leave grass clippings on the lawn to decompose. Re-seed areas as needed. Around the second or third week in November apply fertilizer.

Prune any deadwood from trees and shrubs to help control winter storm damage.

Tie back long climbing rose canes to prevent wind whip during the winter.

Give your compost pile a good turning before winter sets in.

Don't prune Rhododendrons and Hydrangeas now ... they set next year's flowers right after they bloom and you could lose next spring's blossom.

Do your transplanting and moving now in order to give plant material time to settle in. Hosta, Daylilies, Black-Eyed Susan and Bearded Iris can all be divided now. Keep the new transplants well watered throughout the rest of the growing season and make sure your transplants are lightly mulched going into the winter.

Leave ornamental grasses in place ... they will act as a bird refuge in the winter and bring interest to the winter landscape. Cut down in the spring.

Make sure that mulch is pulled back from tree trunks so that mice, voles and chipmunks can't hide in it and munch on bark.

New trees and bushes can be planted in the fall but established trees and shrubs should only be transplanted in the spring.

Do not compost leaves of Roses, Iris, Peonies or Phlox as they can carry disease.

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.

Seasonal Reminders

Keep weeding and dead-heading. Many Connecticut weeds routinely live through the winter!

Early October is your last chance to take cuttings from Coleus and Begonias, root them in water and plant them up. They make quick, easy house plants and will give you indoor color all winter long. Do not be surprised if your red Coleus becomes variegated during the course of the winter ... when planted out in the spring, it will quickly revert to its original color. Your rooted and potted Coleus plants can be planted outside at the same time you plant your annuals!

The bees will continue to pollinate late-blooming perennials: Anemones, Asters, Buddleias, Dahlias and Sedums are particular favorites.

Don't fertilize or prune roses --- wait until spring. Hill-up soil and mulch around the base of Hybrid Teas and climbers before the ground freezes. Rugosas are very hardy and need no attention other than trimming back exceptionally long canes which might be damaged during the winter.

Don't cut back these plants/bushes until spring:

Artemisia	Guara	Montauk Daisies
Bergenia	Hellebore	Perovskia
Buddleia	Heuchera	Sedum
Campanula	Hydrangeas	Shasta Daisies
Caryopteris	Lavender	Stachys
Dianthus	Lobelia	Tiarella

Edge the perennial beds so that the garden has a neat appearance going into the winter.

If you're adding mulch to flower beds wait until the ground has frozen so as to discourage pests from making it a cozy winter home.

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

Dividing and Moving Perennials in the Fall

Fall is the ideal time to divide 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. Start by inserting the fork into the ground 6-12" away from the base of the plant.

Push down on the handle and pry the clump up and out of the soil. Work your way around the plant, doing this, until the clump is free. Lift the clump from the hole and lay it on the ground or on a tarp. Pull the clump apart, discarding the center. You should have at least 2 distinct clumps remaining. 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

Hostas can be divided in the spring or fall and there is no particular advantage to which you choose. It is helpful to pick a time when the weather is cool and moist and in a year of drought that is not easy!

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.

Peonies

October is the best time to divide Peonies. By now the plants have been able to store adequate food reserves in their roots for the following year. Also, the newly replanted divisions will have several weeks to get re-established in their new sites before the onset of winter.

Dig up the plants. On the fleshy crown you will see protruding dormant buds ("eyes") that will be next spring's red shoots. With a sharp knife, cut the roots into sections that have at least three prominent eyes. Set each division in its new spot with the eyes facing up, at a depth of no more than 2 inches below the surface. (Peonies planted too deep will grow, but they'll bloom poorly or not at all.) It may take two years for these three-eye divisions to become large enough to bloom again. Dividing the plants into larger root pieces will produce bigger plants and flowers sooner.

Fall Planting

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.

As you look at your perennial beds now, you can identify current “gaps” 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, Lirope, 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.

Feed the Birds with Berries

Migrating birds need food to fuel their flights, stuffing themselves with reserves of fat built up from eating before departure. Non-migrating birds actually do the same thing, counting on the fat fuel they eat to keep them warm during winter days and nights. Your garden can be the feast those birds need with just a few simple additions.

Many summer-blooming shrubs give you the added bonus of fall color and berries long after they have bloomed. Some have stems which stand out in the winter landscape and provide an unexpected punch of color to what is often a dull, gray time of year. (But many trees will also produce berries for the birds. Even the majestic White Oak’s acorns feed more than squirrels ... blue jays and woodpeckers crack the acorns open and enjoy the contents. Dogwoods and Crabapples are generous bird hosts, as are Viburnums.) Consider adding one of these bushes:

***Callicarpa dichotama* (Purple Beautyberry)**

H: 3-4’

Sun to light shade

Well-drained soil

Pink flowers in late summer are followed by striking purple berries lasting through the winter. Very attractive to cardinals, this shrub is very graceful with downward-arching branches. Since it flowers and fruits on new growth, cut back to 18” in the spring.

***Ilex verticillata* (Winterberry)**

H: 6-10’

Sun to part shade

Evenly moist soil

An obvious choice for native gardens, this shrub’s red berries last well into the winter and are most attractive to birds. Planted in mass, Winterberry will form large colonies. One male plant is needed for pollination to ensure fruit set.

***Symphoricarpos orbiculatus* (Coralberry)**

H: 2-5’

Sun to part shade

Well-drained soil

This dense, deciduous shrub grows with arching stems, blooming June into July with Bell-shaped pinky-white flowers. The flowers give way to clusters of coral berries which mature in the autumn persisting through much of the winter and can be cut for indoor arrangements. Song birds are particularly attracted to the berries. This bush thrives on neglect and is an excellent choice for a woodland garden.

Northern Bayberry (*Myrica pennsylvanica*)

H: 5-10'

Sun to part shade

Dry to medium soil

Early American settlers made candles out of Bayberry's waxy berries and they have the highest fat content of all berries which makes them very popular with small birds. Chickadees, swallows and bluebirds will be especially happy if they find this shrub in your garden!

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. In the spring, you will be able to add the resulting compost to your garden soil.

Getting The Garden Ready to Face Winter

Last spring, New England gardeners discovered, once again, what a long, cold, wet winter can do to trees, shrubs and perennials! Extreme cold isn't always the biggest problem. Early cold spells can damage plants that haven't gone through the normal "hardening off" period. Dry winds can "burn" conifer needles and broadleaf evergreen foliage. Unexpected midwinter thaws can fool plants into breaking dormancy too early, leaving them vulnerable to the next cold snap. Freeze/thaw cycles can heave plants out of the ground. Deer, chipmunk, rabbits and other critters will gnaw bark during the winter and leave evergreens and shrubs damaged. Snow is actually a friend! A constant layer of snow cover provides moisture and helps insulate soil and roots against fluctuating temperatures. Gardeners, as well as skiers, hope for snow!

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.

Access the Acer Gardens web site for our Information Sheet on Putting Your Garden to Bed.

Shade Plants

Ferns. 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.

Hosta. 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.

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.

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.

Our Favorite Winter Evergreens

Bill: *Thujaopsis dolabrata* (False Arborvitae)

Why: When the plant begins to mature the underside of the foliage has white/silver highlights!

Ways to use: Most commonly used as an accent, this evergreen can grow in moist to dry shade.

Tips & Tricks: Be patient. This is a slow growing evergreen and it takes several years for a leader to form. Highly deer resistant!

What to watch for: This evergreen has no insect or disease problems.

Combines well with: Grows in any shade garden and combines well with groundcovers such as myrtle or pachysandra.

Sharon: *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* 'Pendula' (Weeping Alaskan Cedar)

Why: Beautiful vertical, weeping accent, nice in the winter when other trees have lost leaves

Ways to use: A stand-out used alone as a specimen or in a small tree border edging a driveway or garden

Tips & Tricks: Grows in a shady border or in full sun

Combines well with: Azaleas, Rhododendron, Leucothoe and Hydrangea

Rosemary: Cephalotaxus (Plum Yew)

Why: This shrub loves the shade and is deer-resistant.

Ways to use: Depending on the variety, it's a good ground cover, low hedge or focal point.

Tips & Tricks: Can be slow growing but it's very easy to grow.

What to watch for: New growth in the spring is actually yellow!

Priscilla: Ilex crenata 'Soft Touch'

Why: This small leaved evergreen grows best in full sun to part shade and is drought tolerant. It's only 2-3' tall and wide and doesn't need much pruning. The branches are soft but withstand wind and snow

Ways to use: An excellent shrub for edging walkways. Great as a landscape design border plant.

Tips & Tricks: produces black berries that the birds love!

Houseplants and Light

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. Grouping plants together 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 every 2 weeks.

Rex Begonia (fabulous foliage), Ferns (try Japanese Painted Fern or Boston Fern), Coleus, English ivy, Pilea and Peperomia are all good choices for indoor color all winter long. Most houseplants don't like the direct sun of a windowsill although Cyclamen, Gardenia, and Geraniums actually prefer a south facing window. East and west facing windows are fine for most plants but you need to understand the growth habits of your plants. Leaves that are pale green or stems that are weak or too long indicate that your plants need more light. Placing your plant properly is key to growing healthy house plants and light levels are important. And remember ... you may have light coming in through a window now but the angle of the sun is very different in the winter so make adjustments as needed when you place your plants.

Standard light definitions:

Bright light: a sunny southern or western facing window with bright, direct light all day.

Indirect light: an eastern facing window or the interior of a room that faces south or west.

Low light: rooms with north facing windows provide little direct light.

Grow lights are often helpful and some plants thrive when placed under ordinary house lamps. Watching your house plant's performance and monitoring its growth will tell you what it needs. As the days begin to lengthen, those needs may start to change.

Often-Asked Questions

With the drought and heat in control, we watered like mad all summer ... when can we stop?

Plants work on making flowers and leaves all summer long. In the fall, while the soil is still warm, they start concentrating on extending their root systems to get through the winter. You can begin to decrease your watering frequency when more dependable fall rains start. Stop when the ground is too frozen to absorb moisture.

Transplants, division and newly planted perennials should be watered up to the first significant killing frost. Newly planted trees and bushes should be on a regular watering schedule until the ground freezes.

This is a busy time of year. What do I have to do to the lawn and when?

Let grass clippings stay on the lawn to decompose. Around the second or third week in November, apply a high nitrogen fertilizer. Now is the best time to put down grub control.

When should fall planting start?

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!

Are there any ground covers that actually stay green all winter?

Yes, although they may "pale" down a little in severe cold. Ground covers can give welcome shelter to overwintering beneficial insects and pollinators. Their fibrous roots help limit soil erosion and their green shoots help diffuse heavy rains and snow. Acting as a form of living mulch, ground covers shade the soil and help limit weeds.

Partial shade perennial ground covers include Pachysandra, Ivy, European Ginger and Myrtle.

Should I rake the leaves off the ground around rhododendrons, azaleas and hydrangeas?

Many gardeners prefer not to rake leaves out of shade gardens. Fallen leaves act as a natural mulch for broad leaf evergreens such as Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Hydrangeas, Mountain Laurels and other more shallow-rooted bushes and helps prevent moisture loss during a dry winter. As the leaves break down they will form a good base for spring mulch.

Is fall a good time to put compost on flower beds?

Fall is the ideal time to spread compost. Weather conditions are often drier in the fall making it easier to work compost into existing flower beds. Rain and snow and the typical freezes and thaws of our winters will help it work down into the soil.

Chipmunks have been everywhere this summer and they've eaten everything in sight! How do I get rid of them?

Chipmunks have been seen everywhere this past summer and they do cause damage. In the absence of specific repellents for chipmunks, adopt the same approach you use against voles. The voles have had a very active season. Since they do not hibernate (and neither do chipmunks) they will continue chewing all winter long! Now is the time of year to knock the vole population down. Be careful not to leave piles of sticks around or to put down winter mulch in areas which are vole-ridden; it will only provide them with cover to hide in! The Acer Gardens web-site has an information sheet available: **Co-Existing with Voles!**

Chipmunks are said to hate the smell of essential oils, garlic, coffee grounds, eggs and apple cider. Some people report success after sprinkling around repellents such as castor oil, red pepper, chili powder, and paprika. Unfortunately, the chipmunk appetite is pretty insatiable!

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

Can I keep Begonias as house plants? I'd like to keep the blooms going this winter.

Begonias can do very well as house plants if you pay attention to a few simple rules. They are happiest in a well-lit west-facing window. (Some seem to appreciate being stationed under a regular lamp too!) They prefer regular house temperatures and average humidity. Do not overwater but water when the soil is slightly dry...they hate soggy soil! Fertilize lightly through Thanksgiving but don't feed in the winter when light levels are at their lowest. Begonias seem happiest when their roots are slightly crowded.

Storing Tender Bulbs and Tubers

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.

The Vegetable Garden

If you didn't use all your herbs, you can dry them easily in the microwave. Arrange sprigs of thyme, oregano or rosemary in a single layer on a paper towel on a large paper plate and cover with another paper towel. Microwave on High for 1 1/4 minutes or until dry and brittle. Remove the leaves from the stems. Cool them and then crumble into small, labeled Ziploc bags or clean, left-over spice jars. They can be stored for 1 year. Do not freeze.

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 5 different kinds of garlic bulbs available ... all will do well in this climate.

Leave carrots, leeks, parsnips, radishes, beets, green peppers 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.

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 and height 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, squashes and patio tomatoes but new cultivars arrive every year!

Poinsettias and Amaryllis

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.

The Bulbs are Here!

This year, Acer Gardens has many different kinds of bulbs available, with a greatly expanded selection. Tulips are back in many vibrant colors as are the familiar Daffodils and Hyacinths. Bulbs are an easy way to add color and diversity to existing beds and will provide welcome color after a long winter! It's a good idea to plant a few unexpected/unusual bulbs in areas you can see from the house. Try tucking them in under low, spreading evergreens so that they will poke through the branches. Adding small bulbs to your established gardens is a quick way to enhance your spring plantings and a fun way to experiment with "new looks". Daffodils and Paper Whites for forcing and large-sized Amaryllis bulbs, some pre-potted, will also be available.

Some bulbs have proven to be resistant to vole damage. Try growing Alliums, Muscari, Daffodils, Scilla, Hyacinths and Hyacinthoides.

Photograph your garden before you plant your bulbs and mark the photographs so that you know where the new bulbs have been situated. Many gardeners keep a special "bulb" album to help them remember plantings.

Location counts ... bulbs need sun even after they have bloomed in order to develop next year's flowers. After you plant, fertilize and then water the bulbs. It's a good idea to mark the location with a plant stake. You can plant bulbs almost anywhere in the garden as long as the soil drains well. Planting bulbs in clumps will give you an abundant look ... inter-planting them among established perennials allows your perennials to disguise the dying foliage of the bulbs after bloom. Always check the height of the bulbs when planning: taller bulbs at the back, shorter bulbs at the front!

Don't be afraid to mix-and-match your bulbs and to plant in drifts. Careful planning can give you bulb bloom from March to May. Naturalizing gives an informal look and is a particularly useful technique for bulbs that multiply easily. Once flowers fade, the foliage keeps growing so choose a site that doesn't need early spring mowing. Bulbs want well-drained soil. Avoid planting bulbs in areas that remain wet for a long time as they may rot.

Before planting, store your bulbs in a cool, dry place with low humidity away from heat and strong sunlight. Wait to plant until the ground has cooled down to around 55 F so that they don't grow unnecessary top growth and waste their energies. Late October to mid-November is optimum planting time for this area although Lilies should not be planted until well into November. The simple rule is to plant bulbs at a depth of 2 or 3 times the height of the bulbs... measure planting depth from the bottom of the bulbs. As you plant your bulbs, add Bulb Tone fertilizer before back-filling the dirt. When the bulbs have bloomed in the spring and the foliage has died back, top dress the bulbs again with Bulb Tone. Some newly planted bulbs may bloom 2 weeks later than established bulbs but they'll catch up and be on time the following year. All Acer Gardens bulbs are winter hardy in this area.

We plant tulips and daffodils in our own gardens every year. Here's how to keep them really happy:

Daffodils:

Daffodils are a sure sign of spring and incredibly welcoming after a long, gray winter! Deer-resistant and rodent-proof, they earn their keep many times over. Water late-flowering daffodils in spring if the weather turns dry. Deadhead as needed but let the leaves yellow for at least 6 weeks before removing them. They need to store energy for next year's bloom. If you notice sparse bloom it may be time to lift the clump and divide. Once the Daffodils are finished for the season, dig in some bone-meal to ensure good growth for next spring. When cutting Daffodils for the house, don't mix them with other flowers ... their stems produce a fluid which makes other flowers wilt.

Tulips:

Generally the last of the spring bulbs to bloom, Tulips give bold masses of color. They look best when planted in large numbers so the more you plant, the better the show will be! Position them close to the house to give them protection from late storms and cold snaps. Tulips need several hours of direct sunlight in order to put on their best blooms. (They will, however, bloom under deciduous trees which don't have their leaf canopies yet.) Warm afternoon sun and exposure to wind can cut down the length of bloom time so try to avoid those conditions. Since they don't all bloom at the same time, careful selection can give you extended bloom time.

Rainy summers and wet soil are not good news for Tulips . When planting, fertilize. In the spring, as the leaves emerge, fertilize again and water well. Deadhead the Tulips but let the leaves yellow at least 6 weeks before removing. In this climate, tulips generally last about 2-3 years before needing replacing.

Little Bulbs = Big Effect

Adding small bulbs to your established gardens is a quick way to enhance your early Spring plantings and a fun way to experiment with "new looks". The best looks are achieved by planting in fairly large drifts, adding an early pop of color after the long winter. These little bulbs are all early bloomers so it's a good idea to position them where you will see them as you go in and out of the house. As an added bonus, many of the small bulbs have proven to be very resistant to vole damage and to deer.

Try experimenting with some of these:

Galanthus (Snowdrops)

Height: 5-8"

Bloom: March/April

Grown since 1893, Snowdrops' white flowers and shiny foliage really will come through a snow covering to welcome Spring. Grow in partial sunlight, planted 4" deep, spaced 2-4" apart.

Chionodoxa forbesii (Glory of the Snow) 'Blue Giant'

Height: 5-6"

Bloom: April

Early blooming, these blue, white-centered, star-shaped flowers can produce 8 flowers per stem. Plant 4" deep in full to part sun. These bulbs are good for forcing.

Scilla siberica (Siberian Squill)

Height: 5"

Bloom: April

Grown since 1796, these blue flowers force well and will naturalize and self-sow in the garden. Plant 5" deep, 4-6" apart in full to part sun.

Muscari armeniacum (Grape Hyacinth)

Height: 6"

Bloom: April-May

A prolific naturalizer, these deer-resistant, bright blue flowered bulbs last for weeks. Plant in front of taller daffodils for a stunning effect. Good for forcing, the bulbs should be planted 5" deep, 3-4" apart.

Forcing Bulbs

Forcing and growing bulbs indoors gives us a way to have flowers blooming even with snow on the ground and makes a great family winter project. "Forcing" is simply a way of making a bulb produce leaves and flowers ahead of its natural outdoor schedule. You speed up the process by manipulating time and temperature.

Almost any container can be used for forcing bulbs but you will need a run-off saucer under the container if it has drainage holes. Fill the container 2/3 full of soil and moisten. Place the bulbs (close together but not touching) and gently press down. Add soil to the top of the container, water, and put in a cool, dark place like a refrigerator or unheated garage/cellar. Chilling for at least 6-8 weeks will imitate dormancy. Flowering will take about 12 weeks for snowdrops, crocus and daffodils and about 16 weeks for tulips. When you see shoots about 3" above the soil line, bring the bulbs into a cool location. When the foliage and buds are well developed, move the pots to a bright, sunny window.

Forcing paper-whites is particularly easy because the bulbs do not require a chilling period and need only 5-6 weeks from planting to bloom. You'll have Christmas flowers if you start your paper-whites by November 10. Plant at 2-week intervals and enjoy blooms from Christmas to Easter.

Paper-whites grow best using the stones and water method: take a waterproof bowl and fill it 2/3 full of gravel or small, decorative stones, usually white. Insert the base of the bulbs so that they sit firmly and add more stones but do not cover them. Pour in water up to the base of the bulbs, replenishing as needed, and store in a cool, dark place (usually 2-3 weeks) until first growth appears. Some people add 1 Tb. of vodka or plain gin to the paper-white water after the bulbs come out of their storage period. This helps keep the stems short and prevents toppling but will not interfere with bloom. Do not fertilize the bulbs.

Forcing is very hard on most bulbs and they will not bloom again. Tulips and paper-whites should just be thrown out. Amaryllis will usually re-bloom successfully (see above directions.)

Acer Gardens' information sheet on **Forcing Bulbs** is available on the web site and at the nursery.

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 and chipmunks.

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 in this climate and should be stored in the garage.

Clean out the wheelbarrow and discard any damaged garden gloves/tools and any other strange objects that wandered in. 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 hoses. Turn off all outside water faucets.

After draining it, cover your fountain with a winterproof cover or large plastic bag (tied down). Small fountains can come into the garage. Bird baths should be turned upside down on the ground or stored in the garage.

Finally, keep checking Acer Gardens web site for on-going announcements. Enjoy our Instagram photos and remember, Spring will come and we'll all be back in the garden!

General Reminder

Acer Gardens will close on 12/22 and, weather permitting, will re-open the last weekend of March 2023. Have a safe and enjoyable winter ... see you next Spring!

Linda Z. Lynch
Editor and Writer