



# October - November – December 2023 Vol. 18, No. 4

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One of the things New England gardeners learn to do is to say goodbye to disappointments! We live with them all the time. But, we also live with the most unexpected delights and surprises in the garden ... the little things that give us a flash of joy and a lift to the spirit ... the very things that keep us returning to gardening, year after year. Did you forget that you planted that little blue flower and now look at it? Has the acidanthera ever bloomed this well or this long? Why didn't I write down the name of that dahlia ... it's the best shade of rose I ever saw! Is that really the hydrangea I rooted from one leaf? Wow! This is New England and the one thing you can count on is that the gardening year is going to keep you on your toes! Don't get too used to anything because it may never happen exactly this way again. Surprise!

As those rainy, showery days persisted into 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 lived with 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 Workshops**

Acer Gardens will once again hold its annual Container Decorating Workshop concentrating on decorating containers for the holiday season. Learn how to bring the beauty of the coming season into your home and then adjust to the holiday season! Multiple sessions will be held and an Email announcement will be sent out before so that you will have time to sign-up in advance and reserve your place. Last year's Workshops were filled with great ideas and suggestions!

## **The Plant of the Month**

The plant of the Month is available at the nursery 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: **Rabdosia** (Trumpet Spurflower)

Zone: 6-8                      Height: 2-3'                      Spread: 24"

Long a favorite for late seasonal bloom in woodland/shade gardens, Rabdosia features tall blue-purple tube flowers blooming freely well into October on the edge of woodlands. Happiest in partial shade, they are some of the last blooms butterflies stock up on before they begin to migrate and combine well with other fall plants. Deer-resistant, they are pollinator-friendly.

## **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 control storm damage.

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

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.

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, Dendranthemum 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 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	Caryopteris	Lobelia
Asters	Dianthus	Montauk Daisies
Astilbe	Hellebore	Perovskia
Bergenia	Heuchera	Sedum
Buddleia	Lavender	Stachys
Campanula	Liatris	Tiarella

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

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.

### **Amending Soil**

Fall is the ideal time to amend your garden soil. The first step is to have your soil tested. Go to [www.soiltest.uconn.edu](http://www.soiltest.uconn.edu) for complete instructions on the process. You will receive a report which will include both analysis and recommendations for improving your particular soil. Some gardeners test soil from different parts of the garden and act accordingly.

Soil is usually evaluated on two components: fertility and texture. Fertility delivers essential nutrients to plants; texture refers to the size and composition of the soil particles. The nutrients plants need the most are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

Nitrogen produces healthy leaf and stem growth but it does not stay in the soil very long and can be washed out by rains. (This summer's rainy pattern may have altered nitrogen levels in your garden beds.) Too much nitrogen in the soil will cause excessive foliage growth. Phosphorus is needed for root growth. Adding bone meal when planting bulbs in the fall helps in producing flowers next season. Potassium contributes to overall good plant health and is necessary for plants to flower and fruit. It is water soluble and needs to be replenished from time to time.

The ideal garden soil texture is a sandy loam which allows for air and water movement. Adding organic matter to soil encourages beneficial microbial activity and provides a nutritional benefit. Excellent sources of beneficial organic matter are composted peat moss and manure. How well your soil absorbs the organic matter will determine what supplemental feeding will be necessary to keep your plants happy.

Acer Gardens carries many products which can help you add to your soil's general health. Stop into The Garden Shed and discuss your needs with one of our knowledgeable employees.

### **Dividing 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.

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.

## **Show-off Fall Bushes**

Many late-season 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. Consider adding:

### **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. Since it flowers and fruits on new growth, cut back to 18" in the spring.

### **Cornus sericea** (Red Twig Dogwood)

H: 5-9'

Sun to part shade

Average soil

This vigorous, drought-tolerant shrub has white flowers in early summer but its real glory comes in the fall. Bright red stems last all winter so plant where you can see it from the house. The best color comes on young stems so prune heavily in early spring.

### **Hamamelis virginiana** (Witch hazel)

H: 8-10'

Sun to part shade

Well-drained soil

This shrub's leathery green leaves turn golden yellow in early fall, followed by narrow yellow flowers. Native to woodlands, Witch hazel naturalizes very well. Low maintenance, the bush need pruning only for shaping and removing dead wood.

### **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.

### **Itea virginica** (Virginia Sweetspire)

H: 3-4'

Sun to shade

Wet or dry soil

This highly adaptable bush has white flowers in May and June and shows well planted in clusters. It will live cheerfully on the edge of a stream or pond but tolerates dry conditions well. Rich burgundy red foliage appears in the fall.

## **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, 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.

All early-spring blooming perennials should be planted in the fall including Phlox subulata (Creeping Phlox), Iberis (Candytuft), Hellebore (Lenten Rose), Primulas and Pulmonaria.

Come to the nursery and see how full the plant tables are with fall-bloomers! Remember: potted perennials and shrubs should be planted at the same depth as they were growing in the pot, with the top of their root balls at the soil surface. Give them a generous hole, loosen and spread the roots gently and water both before and after planting.

Berries in a fall garden bring their own burst of color, often lasting into early winter. Adding garden color you see from the house is a good way to connect the indoors to the outdoors all season long. Consider planting purple Beauty Bush, Snowberry, Winterberry and Hollies.

And remember: before you start to dig, take a look at the online planting tutorials!

### **Put Your Leaves to Work for You!**

Nature builds soil steadily by using fallen leaves ... and why shouldn't that work for you? The colors of the leaves look wonderful but those same leaves can be a great help to your gardening. And all that organic matter is free!

The large amount of organic material offered by leaves can be used to improve soil structure:

Leaves feed earthworms and beneficial microbes

They increase the moisture retention of soil

Shredded, they make an attractive garden mulch while enriching soil at the same time

Their carbon content balances the nitrogen in your compost pile

They insulate tender plants and self-sown seedlings from the cold

1. Add to your compost pile by layering rich-brown leaves with green material (grass clippings and dead plant matter) and let it sit all winter.
2. Chopped leaves make a protective mulch for vegetable gardens and will help retain soil moisture. They are particularly helpful for berries and ornamental shrubs.
3. While the leaves are falling, mow them into the lawn with the blade set at 3".
4. Fallen leaves will provide some winter cover to wildlife, especially pollinators such as bees, moths, butterflies, snails and spiders.

### **Getting The Garden Ready to Face Winter**

Last spring, New England gardeners discovered, once again, what a long, 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!

Healthy plants are more likely to survive winter unscathed. Start your winter protection routine in autumn. Don't prune after midsummer. Pruning can stimulate new, tender growth and can delay dormancy. 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.

### **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.



## **Changing to Holiday Containers**

Containers can make the switch to winter very easily. Think about adding small evergreens which can be transplanted into the garden in the spring. Back them with colored stems for a little punch. Use branches with berries and add cut evergreens and 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.

## **Storing Tender Bulbs and Tubers**

After a heavy 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.

## **Living with Houseplants**

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.

Study after study has shown that growing house plants is actually good for both our mental and physical well-being! The plants improve air quality and help the general environmental wellness surrounding us but houseplants also help reduce stress and improve a general sense of well-being. They make us feel good and the very act of taking care of them is a contribution we can make to the environment as we wind our way through another winter! Acer Gardens is well-stocked with some amazing house plants to try. Some of them are old and familiar friends (like ferns and succulents); others may be new to you. It's a good idea to group plants with similar care needs together. There's a reason why Spider plants are so often seen hanging around the kitchen sink!

Rex Begonia (fabulous foliage), Ferns (try 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, especially if they're spending time with you in the evening. (If it starts picking the TV shows, you have a major problem!) Watching your house plants performance and monitoring their growth will tell you what they need. As the days begin to lengthen, those needs may start to change.

Spring takes its time getting here these days ... do not be in any hurry to put house plants back outside! The weather is too uncertain in spring and the houseplants will benefit from a little extra time indoors.

## **Often-Asked Questions**

### **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 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. It's a wonderful time in the gardener's year!

### **Should I hill up my climbing roses for the winter?**

Most climbers are happy to be "hilled", especially if they are exposed to the prevailing winter winds. Trim off any dead wood at the ends of the canes and tie up the canes to prevent "wind whip". Hill up the roses to give them extra protection and don't be in too big a hurry to uncover them ... spring doesn't come all that early any more!

### **Can I keep some of my herbs growing in the kitchen this winter?**

Many herbs can be re-potted and brought indoors to winter in the house. They may need misting from time to time as they react to the natural loss of humidity in the air. Rosemary does not like being misted however. (Many people take fresh cuttings of basil, for instance, root them in water, plant and use the new plants as their winter herb supply.)

### **Should I rake the leaves off the ground around rhododendrons and azaleas?**

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 and Mountain Laurel and helps prevent moisture loss during a dry winter. As the leaves break down they will form a good base for spring mulch.

## **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) 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.

## **When do I plant my garlic?**

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 4” 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.

## **How can I lure returning bees to my garden ... what are good bulb choices to plant now for the spring?**

We know how much we need bees as pollinators ... but don’t forget how much bees need us! Early blooming spring bulbs provide the nectar and pollen the arriving bees need. They’re really hungry when they get here! It’s their first fresh food after a long winter and only food around before other native nectar sources become available. Bees will actually roll in pollen in early spring ... some will even sleep inside the flowers. You can easily attract them by providing flowering bulbs in blue, purple, white and yellow. . Plant them in abundance for the greatest effect. The best bulbs for bees include:

Eranthis  
Muscari

Crocus  
Tulips

Hyacinthoides  
Scilla

Camassia

All these bulbs are available now at Acer Gardens in The Garden Shed and planting can begin very soon ... you could have blooms from late March to early May if you plan carefully and the bees will thank you by staying and working in your garden all summer long.

## **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.

## **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, rake off the leaves, add compost and edge the beds. Just add in the extras that apply to your garden! The ground is so much easier to work in the fall and everything will look sharp going through the winter if you edge the beds. Then, in the Spring, you’ll have a head start and one thing will be crossed off your list!

## **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.

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!

## **Holiday Flowers, Wreaths and Containers**

Wreaths, containers, bows and mixed greens will be available at the nursery starting the week before Thanksgiving. If you have favorite holiday table containers bring them to the nursery and let staff help you fill them to make this holiday season really special! Gift certificates are available at the nursery as well as pre-planted paper-whites in containers and many Amaryllis bulbs. Our poinsettia selection now includes some pink/rose shades and many have ruffled petals!

## **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 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 3 years before needing replacing but after the ravages of this past late summer, that may not be true this year!

### **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 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 hoses. Turn off all outside water faucets and cover them.

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 12/23 and, weather permitting, will re-open the last week of March 2024.

Acer Gardens  
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