Gardening Calendar for October

09-19-2016

October begins the best time of the year to plant shade trees. Trees planted in the autumn get an opportunity to develop a root system before they must face a hot dry South Central Texas summer. Review which species of trees are growing best in your area and select from that group but also seek to have a mix of species. Live oak, Texas red oak, Shumard oak, Mexican white oak, cedar elm, Mexican sycamore, bur oak, and chinkapin oak are usually among the best choices. Plant the trees at the same depth as they were grown in the container. Mulch over the root system and rewater every time that the soil dries under the mulch. The key is to wet the entire root ball when you do water.

The lawn is now in prime brown patch season. Reduce the likelihood that your lawn will be infected by the fungus by reducing the amount of irrigation you apply to the grass. Because grass growth slows down in the fall the lawn does not need as much irrigation. If you do sprinkle, apply the water in the morning so that the lawn blades are not wet going into the evening. There are a number of fungicides that will stop the spread of brown patch infection but healing may not occur until next spring.

Feed the lawn with a winterizer fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorous and potassium. A formula such as 18-6-12 works well. Nutrients applied now do not translate into grass growth but are organized in the plant to provide cold hardiness and contribute to a fast green-up in the spring.

Gardeners are faced with a good dilemma in the flower garden. The summer annuals such as zinnias, marigolds, and penta are still blooming well. The may keep blooming until Thanksgiving. You can be ruthless and remove them to make room for the cool-weather annuals or find space to squeeze them in! Use transplants for snapdragons, stock, dianthus, and calendula in the sun. Wait until next month to plant pansies, cyclamen and primula. Use the primula and cyclamen in the shade.

Spread wildflower seed this month. Select an area that is in full sun where the seeds can make contact with the soil. Areas with bare soil and very little weed cover are best. Wildflower seeds usually germinate and bloom even if we do not provide supplementary irrigation or weed them. Consider using bluebonnet transplants if the rumored seed shortage becomes reality.

It is also a good time to thin out iris beds. Replant the rhizomes on 18 inch centers. A key to iris success is planting them shallow. The top of the rhizome should be level with the soil surface. Deer do not eat iris and they are very drought tolerant.

In the vegetable garden plant broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, collards, Swiss chard, kale and other greens by transplants. Plant carrots, lettuce, beets, rutabagas, turnips, and English peas by seed. Keep the tomatoes and peppers well watered and continue to fertilize every month. If stinkbugs become a problem, use Sevin for control. Sevin or Bt will control hornworms. Okra will become less productive as the day length shortens and temperatures cool.