

October Gardening Calendar

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October is an excellent time to plant trees and shrubs. Take advantage of sales at area nurseries and the mild weather to plant recommended shade trees and shrubs. Among the recommended shade trees are live oaks, cedar elms, Texas red oaks, Mexican sycamore, Chinese pistache, Mexican white oak, Shumard oak, bur oak, and chinkapin oak. For shrubs consider yaupon holly, Burford holly, Texas mountain laurel, Sandankwa viburnum, Burford holly, dwarf Chinese holly, standard pittosporum, and primrose jasmine. Trees or shrubs planted in fall and winter have time to develop a root system before they are challenged by a South Texas summer.

You may have noticed that your lawn's growth pattern has changed. As the day lengths become shorter, the grass growth rate is reduced. That change is a signal that it is time to fertilize the lawn. A "winterizer" fertilizer applied now will contribute to winter hardiness and a fast green-up in the spring. The "winterizer" should have a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorous to potassium sources. One of the effective common formulas is 18-6-12.

The cooler weather at night also means that to avoid the fungal disease, brown patch, it is necessary to cut back on irrigation. Reduce the chance of brown patch by letting the lawn move to a drier condition. It is also important to stop watering in the evening. If water is needed, irrigate in the morning so that the lawn never goes into the night with damp foliage.

It would have been best if you applied a pre-emergent herbicide such as Amaze or Dimension at the beginning of September but because the last month has been so hot, applying it now may still be effective in reducing winter weeds.

In the vegetable garden plant broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, chard, mustard, and kale, by using transplants. Plant carrots, lettuce, turnips, beets, rutabagas, radishes and English peas by seed. Wait to plant spinach transplants until late in the month.

Keep the fall tomatoes well-watered and continue to fertilize every 3 weeks with one-quarter cup of winterizer lawn fertilizer per plant. The winter greens such as broccoli also require a heavy fertilization regime to reach maximum production. Be ready to apply a Bt product at the first sign of feeding action by cabbage loopers.

October 1 is a good time to initiate your bird feeding program for the winter. Sunflower seeds, suet, and Niger thistle seed will bring in a large number of both seed and insect eaters. To reduce consumption by squirrels and white-winged doves use a steel feeder with weight sensitive perches. Safflower seed is also a seed that birds like but squirrels do not readily eat. For more detailed information on bird feeding options seek out my archived articles on the topic on plantanswers.com.

The summer zinnias and vinca will continue blooming until after Thanksgiving but the cool weather flowers can also be planted. I keep the zinnias in place as long as possible to accommodate the Monarchs and other butterflies. They also seek out duranta, mistflower, porter weed, mint marigold,

milkweed, lantana, and asters. Snapdragons, stocks, dianthus, petunias, calendula, and ornamental kale can be planted this month for winter color. Late in the month sweet peas (by seed), pansies, cyclamen, and primrose can also be planted unless the temps stay high. If so wait until November.

It is an excellent time to spread wildflower seed. Consider the Central Texas mixes. Most local nurseries have the packets or it can be purchased from the internet retailers. Plant wildflower seed in full sun where the seed can reach the soil. Seed to soil contact is required.