

Fall Gardening Notes

September plant: greens, radishes, spinach, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, beets, carrots, chard, peas, wildflower seeds, iris, daylilies, cannas, alyssum, marigolds, purple coneflowers, butterfly weed, rudbeckias, snapdragons, most perennials, and herbs (except basil).

October plant: lettuces, spinach, kale, Bok Choy, garlic, onions, pansies, alyssum, snapdragons, sweet peas, columbines, trees, shrubs

Feed lawns in September. This is for good growth next spring. You can also lay sod even in October.

Broccoli—set out transplants of Green Comet, Emperor, or Premium Crop. Set out in early September into prepared soil. Fertilize with 21-0-0 fertilizer for bigger heads. Cut big heads and leave the little side shoots to develop for additional harvest. Water daily the first week and mulch. Never let the soil planted with broccoli dry out. Broccoli needs good drainage and even water. It is better not to plant broccoli or other members in the cabbage family in the same place more than one year at a time. Control caterpillars with Bt. Light freezes will not hurt it except when the heads are forming.

Cold Protection:

Best protection is covering plants with an insulator such as frost blankets. These should cover the plants and be anchored to the soil. It's the released heat in the soil that warms the plants, not the covering. The covering is there to keep the released heat from the soil from being lost to the atmosphere or from being blown away by icy winds. Some people use outdoor Christmas lights under their frost covers. Be sure these have been checked for shorts. Large water jugs can provide another source of radiate heat. Place very close to the plants for the best effect. When covering plants with clear plastic, use a double layer. This creates a dead space between the layers that provides some insulation. Row covers are better than clear plastic.

Preparing for a Fall Garden:

Till up soil and get rid of any weeds. It is helpful to water the soil a few days before to loosen it up, but never till or dig in wet soil. Add a couple of inches of compost and till in, along with fertilizer as need is shown by a soil test. A soil test takes two or three weeks, so it's too late for September plantings, but good for October. Build up the bed so it is raised for good drainage. Cover the finished area with mulch. Then pull back the mulch to plant.

Remember that days to harvest may be longer in the fall, since it is getting colder and that slows the growth and ripening rates.

Once transplants are in the ground, provide some temporary shade for them if the weather is still hot. Any sun-blocking device on the southwest side of the plant will do. Transplants can be watered in after planting with a weak solution of water soluble fertilizer, then feed regularly with side-dressings during the growing season, as recommended on the fertilizer bag, usually every 4 to 6 weeks. You can also plant some seeds of cool-loving vegetables such as cabbage and lettuce indoors under a grow light for transplant into the garden in October.

To avoid damage from caterpillars, use Bt or a light spun row cover.

Existing Plant care:

Shear back rose bushes, salvias, and butterfly bushes by about one-third. Fertilize. Add fall blooming transplants, such as mums, Mexican mint marigolds, fall asters, obedient plant, and fall ornamental grasses. Strawberries planted in the fall are the best ones. They grow all winter and have a better crop in the spring. Remove all flowers that form in the fall months to concentrate on root growth. Raised beds are best for good drainage. Drip watering systems are best. The best variety is Chandler.

Elbon Rye can be planted as a green manure this fall to be tilled into the soil in the late winter at least a month before spring planting.

Cut blackberry canes back to the ground. This will provide new fruiting canes for next year.

Growing Garlic:

Plant as close to the autumnal equinox as possible. Plant the cloves four to six inches apart to give them plenty of room to grow. Plant each clove about 3 inches deep in loose, well-draining soil rich with organic matter. You can add one pound of blood meal to each 10 feet row. The largest cloves grow the largest bulbs. Mulch heavily after planting. When the green plants begin to grow through the mulch in the spring, apply a foliar feeding every two weeks. Water regularly, but stop in June to allow the bulbs to form better. Keep weeds pulled at all times. As the leaves begin to die back in June, harvest while there are just a few green leaves left to each bulb. Dig carefully and brush off the soil gently. Let dry in good circulation for four to six weeks. Store dried bulbs in net bags. Do not refrigerate. Be careful not to bruise garlic at any stage of growth or harvest.

Wildflower preparation:

Find a spot with good drainage and full sun. The soil should not be too rich. Remove existing weeds or grass. For Bermuda, you will need to use a weed killer several weeks before planting. Lightly scrape the soil to till down to about 2 inches. Broadcast seeds, then pat down. Do not cover the seeds with dirt, just make sure they are in good contact with the soil. Some suggested wildflowers are bluebonnets, Indian blanket, lemon mint, Mexican hat, purple coneflower, etc. Try to get Texas grown and harvested seeds, such as those from local wildflower farms.

Tree planting:

Fall planted trees will grow roots throughout most of the winter and be much more prepared for hot weather next summer. When choosing an oak, burr oak and chinquapin are better as they are not as susceptible to Oak Wilt. Water during the fall and winter if it doesn't rain enough. Dormant trees still need water.

Perennials to plant in the fall:

For full sun: Blackfoot daisy, Copper Canyon Daisy, Maximilian sunflower, santolina, iris, roses, butterfly bush, Scabiosa, lantana, coral honeysuckle, Salvia, perennial bulbs, and pinks.
For Shade: Columbine, Turk's cap

Divide: Amaryllis, Cannas, Daylilies, Iris, Liriope, ferns, and perennials that have gotten too large. Replant elsewhere or share with others.

Plant seeds of poppies and larkspurs in October. Plant pansies in October also. You can also dig up caladium bulbs and let them dry. Store in a cool, dry area that doesn't go below about 55 degrees.

Fall rose care:

In September, fertilize roses and monitor for diseases. They need to go into winter with good health. Container grown roses can be planted in September and October, but the bare rooted ones should be planted in late winter.