

Gardening Almanac for the Plateau

October

Weather -- Average Temperatures and Rainfall:

October traditionally has the first frost of the season, on average around the 15th. This month will generally continue the pattern of low rainfall, but can surprise us with heavier than normal rains. Rainfall over the last 30 years has averaged 3.47 inches. Average maximum temperature is 68 degrees F. while average minimum temperature is 43 degrees F.

Activities:

- Cool season grasses should be completely recovered from the high temperatures and moisture stress of the summer. Mid October is an excellent time to fertilize with a slow release fertilizer and it can be applied at a rate of one and one-half pounds of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. of lawn area. If you not use a slow release fertilizer, then you should apply no more than one pound of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. of lawn area now and repeat the process in mid November.
- Fall leaves will present a challenge this month as the beauty of fall foliage continues its displays. Some oak varieties will drop their leaves and others will hold onto them until spring. Cleaning gutters and raking or blowing leaves off the lawn areas is important. In order to compost most of the leaves in this area, there are 2 things to keep in mind. If you simply pile them up in a wooded area, they will decompose very slowly. They also will provide good winter cover for snakes and other wildlife. Using a special mower setting is one means of shredding, and there are others. All take energy. Many people burn their leaves, and it is important to call for a burning permit. Also, in some areas, you may put them in a ditch by the road, or bagged, and they will be picked up.
- Late harvest vegetables continue to do well in this area. It is time to dig and store root vegetables as well as harvest winter squashes and gourds. This is also a perfect time to roto-till your garden and plant a green fertilizer crop, high in nitrogen, to be tilled under next spring.
- Some people have difficulty raising good quality bulb plants because of insect and rodent damage. There are solutions to these problems and the local Extension Service can help you find one to suit the size of your projects. After planting the tulip and daffodil, as well as other bulbs, fertilize with a slow release bulb booster product (9-9-6 or 18-6-12). If you didn't order fall bulbs, your local nurseries are well stocked with spring flowering bulbs.
- Perennials can also use a last minute fertilizing to help their root systems. This is a good time to plant some reseeding annuals for a fall showing, such as pansies and violas, or Johnny-JumpUps. Some biennials that need cold weather before blooming in the spring can be planted, such as foxgloves, Sweet William and hollyhock varieties. This is also an excellent time to review your flowerbeds and make notes for rearrangements. Putting bulbs in the center or back of beds will allow their post flowering foliage to be hidden.
- Annuals and many perennials die back to the ground every year after a killing frost making the top growth turn black. Now is the time to remove the dead annuals and cut back those dormant perennials to ground level, removing the debris from the garden. At the end of the season, never prune plants with a woody framework such as evergreens, candytuft, thyme, Russian sage, dianthus, lavender, hardy rosemary and butterfly bush. You can snip off old flower stalks and leggy growth, but don't go any farther than that. Cutting these plants to the ground in fall is usually fatal, since they continue to photosynthesize through the winter. Prune these plants in spring after the threat of a hard freeze is over.
- Continue to water your garden areas, particularly new plantings. Soaker hoses are ideal since they keep the water just where you want it to go. Water slowly and deeply, allowing the water to penetrate about 6 inches down.
- October begins the ideal tree and shrub planting time. Water them well and often until rainfall picks up in the next month or two.
- Winter annuals, such as pansies, violas, snapdragons and dianthus, can be planted now. Hardy herbs such as parsley, thyme and rosemary can also be planted, even among the winter annuals creating a bust of color in the spring.
- This month, apply a second application of nitrogen on your lawn (no more than 1 pound to 1,000 square feet).
- As you start fall leaf clean up, consider using chopped up leaves for mulch (just run over them with your mulching mower).

Wildlife:

Birds you may see this month include:

Red bellied woodpecker, Red headed woodpecker, Hairy woodpecker, Downy woodpecker, Pileated woodpecker, Purple finch, Northern cardinal, male Red tail hawk, Eastern bluebird, Muscovy duck, Mallard duck, Lesser scaup, Canada goose, American goldfinch, Carolina wren, Tufted titmouse, White breasted nuthatch, Mourning dove, Carolina chickadee, Blue jay, European starling, House finch, Ruby throat hummingbird, Yellow-shafted flicker American crow, American robin, Gray catbird and Turkey vulture.

Flowers:

Flowers you may see include:

Chrysanthemum, Yarrow, Autumn Joy sedum, Tuberous begonia, impatiens, wax begonia, Vinca, Pampas grass, Fountain grass and Petunia.

This information has been created by the Cumberland County Master Gardeners Association, Crossville TN