

From The Ground Up

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It's the Season

By Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

It's that time of year. Time to tidy-up our flower beds and vegetable gardens. Fall clean-up usually includes pulling out annuals done in by frost and cutting back dead stems of herbaceous perennials. I sometimes get asked whether it's better to cut back certain perennials now or in the spring. Well, that depends. Traditionally, the practice has been to cut back most perennials every fall. However, more gardeners are deciding to leave their pruning until spring.

Left standing, perennials can add color and form to a winter garden. Ornamental grasses, for example, are plants that gardeners frequently leave untrimmed as they provide much appreciated color as well as movement to a static winter scene. Plus, there are other advantages to keeping old growth on perennials for the winter. Remaining stems and leaves can capture snow, which provides extra insulation for plants. This is especially important for those that are only marginally hardy. Wildlife such as birds benefit from the additional coverage that they can use for places to rest or hide. Seed heads left on dried flowers and ornamental grasses also supply birds with much needed fuel this time of year.

On the other hand, there are a few good reasons to cut back perennials in the fall. Plants that are harboring diseases or insect pests should be pruned back. Removing diseased plant material in the fall will help prevent problems from reoccurring in the spring. You may also want to cut back perennials that you don't want spreading by

seed. Gardeners may trim unattractive foliage that doesn't add interest to the winter landscape. Ultimately, one's own sense of garden tidiness will help make the final decision about how much garden pruning you do this fall.

As a rule of thumb, perennials not pruned in autumn will need to be cut back or dead-leaved in the spring before new growth emerges. Cut back old vegetation to approximately 2-3 inches off the ground. Avoid cutting back too near the crown. Whether you prune your perennials in the fall or spring cut them back when they are dormant. In the fall, if plants are pruned too early it can encourage new growth. This uses up valuable resources the plant needs for next year. If surprised by earlier-than-expected growth in the spring, then just clean-up the plant by pulling out dead stems rather than risk cutting back new growth.

Now is also the time to plant hardy bulbs and dig up tender bulbs. If you plan to bring any plants indoors, be sure to check them first for unwanted guests. Clean and sharpen garden tools and get lawn mowers tuned up to avoid the springtime rush. Remember to drain



Photo: University of Illinois Extension

gasoline from gas-powered equipment for winter storage.

After all your hard work, sit back and take a breather. Then come the dead of winter, you'll be ready to start leafing through those seed catalogs and start planning for next season...

Eye Spy...In My Yard



A sad sight in my garden (besides the weeds) is the sunflowers bowing their heads. As the seed heads mature the flowers droop indicating the flowers are finishing for the season. The good news though is the seeds will soon be ready for harvest. Click [here](#) for info on harvesting & roasting.

Editor's Note

This is a combined September and October *From the Ground Up* newsletter and the last one for the 2014 season. Due to time constraints, this is the last newsletter with me as editor. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the newsletter over the years, especially those who have so wonderfully committed their time to write a monthly column. I couldn't have done it without you! Thank you for this opportunity.

From The Ground Up

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September

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8 Clean up garden areas as plants are done producing. Remove and discard diseased plants. Healthy plants	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16 Can! The National Center for Home Food Preservation has many great, safe recipes available at	17	18 Remove summer-fruiting raspberry floricanes (fruiting canes) once leaves die or if they show sign of disease.	19	20
21	22	23 Watch local big box stores, etc. for end of season clearance	24	25 Plant garlic for next summer's harvest.	26	27
28	29 Leave produce, such as eggplant and peppers, on vines until overripe for seed-saving ..	30				

October

			1	2	3	4 Force Christmas cactus to bloom in late December.
5	6 Treat any thistles or broad-leaf weeds, such as dandelions, just before first freeze as they are pulling nutrients into their roots for over-wintering.	7	8 Dig glads and other tender bulbs and store for winter	9	10 Clean up orchard by throwing fallen fruit out	11
12	13	14 Dig potatoes and let cure before storing for winter	15	16 Water trees until ground freezes if insufficient rain (or snow!)	17	18
19	20	21 Plant spring bulbs for color next year	22	23	24 Clean mower blades and other garden implements and put away for season	25 Bake pumpkin seeds for healthy snacks
26	27 Remove rhubarb and asparagus foliage after a hard frost	28	29 Isolate houseplants that have been outside before bringing indoors to allow for "debugging"	30	31	

Yard and Garden: Enjoying Fall Pumpkin and Squash

Excerpt from article by Richard Jauron, ISU Department of Horticulture and Greg Wallace, ISU Extension and Outreach



One of the best aspects of fall gardening is the harvesting of pumpkins and squash. The closely related members of the squash family are popular parts of the fall calendar, from Halloween through the making of

favorite fall and holiday recipes. Tips from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach horticulturists help gardeners enjoy these fall favorites.

When should I harvest my pumpkins?

Pumpkins can be harvested when they have developed a deep, uniform orange color and the rind is hard. Mature pumpkins can also be left in the garden or field until the vines are killed by a light frost or freeze. When harvesting pumpkins, handle them carefully to avoid cuts and bruises. Cut the pumpkins off the vine with a sharp knife or pair of lopping shears. Leave several inches of stem attached to each fruit. A pumpkin with a three to five inch stem or handle is more attractive. Also, pumpkins with stems are less likely to rot. Do not carry pumpkins by their stems. The stems may not be able to support the weight of the pumpkins and may break off.

What is the proper way to store pumpkins?

After harvesting the pumpkins, cure them at a temperature of 80 to 85

degrees Fahrenheit and 80 percent relative humidity for 10 days. Curing helps to harden their skins and heal any cuts and scratches.

After curing, store pumpkins in a cool, dry location. Storage temperatures should be 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit. When storing pumpkins, place them in a single layer where they don't touch one another. Good air circulation helps to prevent moisture from forming on the surfaces of the fruit and retards the growth of decay fungi and bacteria. Placing the pumpkins in piles generates unwanted heat which may result in the rotting of some fruit. Promptly remove and discard any pumpkins that show signs of decay.

When do you harvest winter squash?

Harvest winter squash when the fruit are fully mature. Mature winter squash have very hard skins that can't be punctured with the thumbnail. Additionally, mature winter squash have dull-looking surfaces.

When harvesting winter squash, handle them carefully to avoid cuts and bruises. These injuries are not only unsightly, they provide entrances for various rot-producing organisms. Cut the fruit off the vine with a pruning shears. Leave a one-inch stem on each fruit.

What is the proper way to store winter squash?

After harvesting, cure winter squash (except for the acorn types) at a temperature of 80 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of 80 to 85 percent. Curing helps to harden the squash skins and heal any cuts and scratches. Do not cure acorn squash. The high temperature and relative humidity during the curing process actually reduce the quality and storage life of acorn squash.

After curing, store winter squash in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location. Storage temperatures should be 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Do not store squash near apples, pears, or other ripening fruit. Ripening fruit release ethylene gas which shortens the storage life of squash.

When properly cured and stored, the storage lives of acorn, butternut, and hubbard squash are approximately five to eight weeks, two to three months, and five to six months, respectively.

The Herb Garden

The herb section highlights herbs that can be grown in the South Dakota region

By Priscilla Jurkovich, Master Gardener



Photos from Priscilla Jurkovich's garden

Summer savory *Satureja hortensis* is an annual from the Lamiaceae (mint) family. Summer savory grows well in alkaline soil and prefers sun to thrive. The herb is small with a height of 1-2 ft. It has dark green leaves and pale lavender flowers which bloom August through September. The summer savory is very fragrant and is the characteristic ingredient of herbes de Provence. Summer savory is preferred over the perennial winter savory which is known for a bitter flavor. Summer savory is best propagated by seed after danger of frost and self sows well.

The leaves and stems can be used for culinary and medicinal purposes. Because the herb can decrease flatulence (gas), it has been used in many bean dishes. It can flavor sausages, stuffing, and stews. It can be used in place of sage or thyme for some recipes and blends well with many of the

mint herbs like rosemary, basil or thyme. It is a good source for trace minerals, fiber and vitamins. The leaves can be put directly on a bee sting or bug bite to decrease the pain and inflammation. Summer savory is used for inflammatory bowel disease, diarrhea, colic, stomach upset, sore throats and nausea. It dries well and you may start to harvest when it's 6 inches tall. Summer savory grows quickly and responds well to frequent pinching back. This harvesting will also encourage the plant to sprout new leaves and remain bushy.



Container Planting for Fall

I love the season's change from summer to fall. The evening air is crisper. Trees are taking on their fall color. And mums are now widely available.

One of my favorite activities this time of year is to replant my tired looking flower pots from the summer and create new containers that capture the look and feel of autumn. For some reason, at this time of year, I pay more attention to textures and form so my fall pots usually have much more than just flowers in them. I like to look around my landscape and see what has fallen on the ground or could stand a little judicious trimming. We have quite a few evergreen, maple and birch trees on our property. I love to incorporate yellow and red maple leaves, birch twigs and pine cones together with flowers to create striking displays.



Fall color schemes generally include an assortment of oranges, yellows and reds. These are welcoming bold tones that grab ones attention even from a distance. But don't forget the deep purples, browns and greens. Cool-season flowers that do well in fall planters include calendulas, pansies, sedums, asters, and ornamental peppers. Of course, we can't forget mums, which come in an amazing array of autumn colors. Plants such as coral bells, Swiss chard, ornamental kale and cabbage offer great decorative foliage for fall pots as well. *Helpful tip:* if using a perennial in a fall container, overwinter it indoors and plant outside next spring.

When designing a container, consider the height and spread of the plants you choose. Spikes and other eye-catching, upright plants add vertical interest and are often used as the focal point of the container. Ornamental grasses or branches from birch trees, red twig dogwoods or evergreens also work well for adding height to an arrangement.



Mounding or spreading plants are used to add fullness and help show off the vertical centerpiece. Plants that cascade over the edge of the pot soften and anchor it to the surroundings. Creating a design using all three plant types (often called thrillers, fillers and spillers) is the traditional blueprint for containers; however, there really are no rules. That's why designing pots is so much fun! I typically plant a few containers using only mums.

How you arrange your pots can also make a statement. Grouping your containers together can help fill in a large, open area such as on a porch or patio. You can also arrange pots vertically by stacking them into a tower. I did this using three different sized pots. I placed a smaller pot into the soil of a larger, broader pot. To help secure the pots, I inserted a stick or garden stake through the top pot's drainage hole and pushed it through into the larger pot's soil. My "tower" of mums gave the corner of the patio a fun, eye-popping feature.

To fill out an autumn-themed design surround your containers with pumpkins, decorative gourds or other seasonal odds and ends that you come across. As we get closer to Halloween you can easily find straw bales, cornstalks and decorative scarecrows. Later in the season, you can add a pumpkin planter. Scoop out a pumpkin, put in a drainage hole, then fill with potting soil and plant pansies or mums. Decorate the pumpkin with ribbon or paint on a stylish design for a truly unique planter. Happy Planting!

LOCAL FOODS CORNER

SDSU Extension Seeks Vegetable Seed Donations for School Gardens

By Chris Zdorovtsov
Community Development Field Specialist

Educational gardens are popping up across the state. To assist with these teaching gardening efforts, SDSU Extension seeks seed donations to assist with these projects. In 2014, 33 school and youth garden programs across the state each received 20 seed packets from this effort.

The donated seeds are intended only for newly starting and established gardens that offer an educational program.

Eligible projects include gardens for schools, learning centers, daycares, 4-H clubs or other non-profit group in South Dakota, where the produce will be used as part of the program or freely shared with those of need. Qualified projects must include an educational component.

Unopened seed packets with varieties that are appropriate to South Dakota are requested. Vegetable seeds are highest priority, but flower seeds will also be accepted. Certified seed potatoes and onion sets or transplants would also be welcomed in the spring.

Ideally, seeds would have been stored in cool, dark conditions where they were not exposed to moisture or temperature extremes or are

purchased new for the 2015 growing season. Please consider the age of the seeds when donating. Older seeds have reduced germination rates so please only donate seeds packaged for 2014 or 2015.

Please consider donating to educational garden programs across the state. Deliver or mail seed donations to SDSU Extension Regional Center in Sioux Falls, 2001 E. 8th St., Sioux Falls, SD 57103. Attn: Chris Zdorovtsov.

Applications for donated seed open December 2014
If you are interested in receiving donated seeds, please call the SDSU Extension Regional Center in Sioux Falls in December for an application. An application notice will also be sent on the SDSU Youth Gardening LISTSERV in December.

To join the LISTSERV or for additional information on this project, please contact Chris Zdorovtsov, SDSU Extension Community Development Field Specialist, at 782-3290 or at Christina.Zdorovtsov@sdstate.edu.



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