

Important to get yard ready for winter

By Melinda Myers

You can see and feel the change of seasons. Fall color is starting to appear, pansies, mums and asters are in the garden center and your thoughts are turning to preparing your landscape for winter.

Those in warm climates are switching to winter annuals, while those in colder regions are fortifying their landscapes for the cold winter ahead. No matter where you live, invest some time in preparing your landscape for the change in seasons. Dedicating some time now will pay off with healthier more beautiful plants next spring.

Continue to mow the lawn high as long as it continues to grow. There's no need to cut it short unless that is the look you prefer.

Fertilize the grass with a low nitrogen slow release fertilizer. Fall fertilization provides the greatest benefit to your lawn and gives you the best value for the time and money invested.

Those in cooler regions growing bluegrass, fescue and perennial ryegrass should make a final application between Halloween and Thanksgiving before the ground freezes.

Those in warmer climates growing centipede, Bermuda and zoysia should also fertilize around Labor Day. However, be sure to make the last fall application at least one month prior to the average first killing frost.

Shred leaves as they fall. Leave some on the lawn to add organic matter and nutrients to the soil. As long as you can

see the grass blades through the shredded leaves your lawn will be fine.

Use the rest of the shredded leaves in your compost pile, as mulch on top of the soil or as a soil amendment. Just dig a two to three inch layer into the top 12 inches of annual or new planting beds. These leaves will break down and add organic matter. By spring the leaves will decompose and the garden bed will be ready to cultivate and plant.

Plant a few bulbs now for a colorful early spring display. Incorporate compost, aged manure or other organic matter into the planting area. Add a low nitrogen slow release fertilizer at the time of planting. In general, plant bulbs two to three times their vertical diameter deep. Follow specific planting and spacing directions on the package or tag.

Select animal-resistant bulbs to avoid squirrels digging up the bulbs and deer and rabbits eating the blooms. Daffodils, hyacinths, grape hyacinths and squills are a few to consider. Little Tommies (*Crocus tommasinianus*) tend to be more squirrel resistant than other crocus varieties.

Those gardening in mild climates need low chill bulbs that will thrive and flower after a mild winter. Or purchase precooled bulbs for winter planting and spring flowering.

Allow disease- and insect-free perennials to stand for winter. This will increase their winter hardiness and your enjoyment. The dried leaves, stems and seedheads provide beauty for you to enjoy, seeds for the birds and overwintering homes for many butterflies and beneficial insects.

Plant trees, shrubs and perennials. The soil is warm and the air is cool – perfect conditions for planting and establishing trees, shrubs and perennials. And for those lucky enough to garden in warm climates, add a few winter annuals.

Continue to water the landscape as needed throughout the fall.

Be sure to water evergreens and new plantings thoroughly before the ground freezes.

No matter where you live or the size of your garden, get outdoors and enjoy the beauty of fall. And be sure to invest a bit of energy now to insure your landscape is ready for the season ahead.

Gardening expert, TV/radio host, author and columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books.