



## October Tips MISCELLANEOUS

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- When removing disease-infected plant parts or debris, do not place refuse on the compost pile. The disease pathogens will live in the compost pile and can be transmitted with the application of compost to other garden beds, unless compost temperatures reach above 180F and decomposition is complete.
- Late-fall tilling can help control insects, such as corn borer, corn earworm, cucumber beetle, squash bug, and vine borer, because it exposes overwintering insects to winter conditions. It also makes spring soil preparation easier.
- Someday, it will be possible for plant taxonomists to classify plants with incredible precision. Research is progressing on DNA printing for various plant cultivars to allow positive identification of a cultivar, as compared to the subjective methods now used.
- When temperatures start dropping, be sure to check for any chemicals that should not freeze. Move them to a safe storage place where temperatures do not fall below 40F. Frozen liquids can break jars and split plastic containers, spreading concentrated chemicals within reach of children or pets.
- Researchers at the Wye Research Farm in Maryland are making some interesting discoveries. They have found the peak time for nitrogen movement through the soil is in the winter months, rather than in spring or summer when most nitrogen fertilizers are applied. With peak movement of water-polluting nitrates being from October through December, it pays, both in respect to the environment and to improved soil conditions, to plant cover crops that recover nitrogen from the soil. There is still time to sow a winter wheat or rye cover.
- A good way to shell sunflower seeds is to rub them across an old washboard. If the sunflower heads are large, break them into two or three pieces to get a better grip on them and rub them on the board as if you were washing clothes.
- Prepare for Thanksgiving bouquets by cutting chrysanthemum stems before heavy frosts. Remove all leaves, and plunge stems into a pail of water leaving only the blossoms exposed on top. Store the flowers in a cool garage or cellar where they will not freeze. Make flower arrangements five to seven days before the holiday.
- Pesticide labels don't stop after telling you how to use the product -- they also tell you how to dispose of any extra. For everyone's safety, **READ THE LABEL AND FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY.**
- Do not apply quick-acting fertilizers while tilling the soil during the fall. Otherwise, the nitrogen will leach away before spring. Materials that release nutrients slowly into the soil, such as rock phosphate, can be worked into the soil in the fall.
- Fall is an excellent time for taking soil samples in your lawn and garden. Soil tests will measure the acidity or alkalinity of the soil and the levels of some of the major elements required for plant growth, such as phosphorus, magnesium, and potassium. If lime is needed, now is a good time to apply it.
- In folklore, woollybear caterpillars are used to forecast the severity of the winter -- the more black on the woollybear, the colder. Conduct your own research to see if it works. Though these insects feed on a variety of



garden vegetables, they are not present in large numbers and are not pests of any particular plant.

- Pebbles or crushed rocks make an attractive mulch and don't attract rodents the way organic mulch can. With a combination of rocks and a barrier layer (such as 3 or 4 sheets of newspaper, 4 mil. black plastic, or one of the new weed barrier fabrics) underneath, weed control is assured for up to two years. Use impermeable barrier layers (solid plastic) in situations where no plant growth is desired. Around shrubs or trees, use a permeable weed barrier (landscape fabric) that allows air and water to reach the roots of desirable plants.
- Pine needles are like good building insulation -- full of air spaces. They insulate the soil and make an ideal winter mulch for perennial flowers, small fruit plants (especially strawberries), and acid-loving shrubs and trees. Pine needles prevent alternate freezing and thawing that may heave shallow-rooted plants out of the ground, a problem especially serious with heavy soils.
- Treat magnolia and beech leaves for dried flower arrangements in a mixture of 1/3 glycerine and 2/3 warm water. Crush stem ends and place them in a jar of the mix for three weeks to produce a rich, glossy-brown foliage.
- Mulches applied too early can do more harm than good. A mulch is used to keep soil temperatures constant and prevent frost heaving, not keep it warm. Therefore, it is best not to mulch until the soil temperature has reached 32F.
- The bitter, golf-ball sized fruits of the trifoliate orange (*Poncirus trifoliate*) may have some uses after all. Sections of the fruit in hot tea have been reported as tastier than lemon, and the entire fruit makes an attractive, miniature pomander when studded with cloves and covered with spices.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dorn, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines, and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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