



September Tips MISCELLANEOUS

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- All of those grass clippings and other organic matter that you compost really do add nitrogen to your soil. Ten (10) pounds of nitrogen are released gradually over a year's time for every one percent organic matter in cultivated Virginia soils. This amount is relatively small and is not considered in Virginia Tech fertilizer recommendations.
- If you use pesticides, be sure not to mix up more than you need. Excess pesticide is difficult to dispose of properly. It must be sprayed on a plant listed as appropriate on the label and at no more than the allowable rate. This means you cannot re-spray the area that you initially covered, and you cannot spray a pesticide listed for tomatoes on your boxwood, unless also listed for boxwood. NEVER pour pesticides down a sink or storm drain.
- Fall clean-up and planting in the garden can provide enjoyable exercise on sunny days. One hour of gardening chores (cultivating, pruning, weeding) burns about 300 calories!
- "Thigmomorphogenesis," the response of plants to mechanical perturbation, is a common plant response to mechanical stress (wind, touch, vibration). It appears to be a plant's method of strengthening itself to withstand further stresses. The effect also can be seen in woody plants, in which the wood of stems and branches often becomes reoriented in a way that braces the plant against prevailing winds. These effects are a hormonal response mediated by ethylene.
- Seaweed and seafood wastes often are untapped resources for gardeners near the coast. To reduce their strong odor, these materials need to be composted. For seaweed, compost with a high nitrogen material, such as manure or grass clippings. With seafood scraps, add a material high in carbon, such as dry leaves or aged sawdust.
- Gather ornamental grasses for dried arrangements.
- Nitrogen fertilizer not taken up by plants can leach into the groundwater, polluting it and nearby streams and rivers. Studies at the Wye Research Farm in Maryland have shown that a rye cover crop can rapidly take up excess nitrogen from the soil (160 lbs. N assimilated per acre 90 days after planting). Nitrogen recovered by a cover crop will be returned to the soil when the cover is tilled under in spring (when crop plants can use it). In addition, a winter cover will reduce soil erosion and add organic matter in gardens. Sow winter rye at 3 1/2 ounces per 100 square feet between now and late October.
- The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden has an interesting theme garden. It seems that Biblical, Shakespeare, or other traditional themes don't really excite children, but the dinosaur garden is a real hit. Plan one of your own using prehistoric plants, such as dawn redwood *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, maidenhair tree *Ginkgo biloba*, or katsura tree *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, all of which date back from 150 to 270 million years. Other plants to include are bald cypress, bayberry, boxwood, fern, and larch.
- Not only is compost good for your garden, but making and using it also is good for your community. Any

leaves, grass clippings, or prunings that go into the pile don't end up wasting space in the landfill.

- Make a simple compost pile by incorporating some garden soil and a little fertilizer into a pile of leaves. Next spring, you will have a supply of leaf mold to improve the structure of your garden soil. To achieve faster decomposition of the compost pile, turn the pile over every month or so during the growing season.
- Collect okra seed pods, gourds, sumac seed heads, rose hips, and other suitable material for dried flower arrangements. Air dry these materials in a dark, cool location.
- Autumn is a good time for improving your garden soil. Add manure, compost, and leaves to increase the organic matter content. Before adding lime to your soil, have your soil tested to determine if your soil is acidic and needs lime.
- You can help leaves break down more easily by running a lawn mower back and forth over the pile. Put the shredded leaves directly onto the garden or compost pile.
- Get in a supply of builders sand for the winter. It comes in handy not only for increasing traction on walks and driveways, but also for making soil mixtures and for storing root crops.
- A green manure or cover crop improves water infiltration, reduces soil erosion, reduces nutrient leaching, and promotes the growth of microorganisms. Annual rye can be sown at the rate of 1 to 2 pounds per 1000 square feet during September and October. A light fertilization with 1 to 2 pounds of 5-10-10 generally will increase plant growth.
- Powdery mildew becomes more abundant following periods of cool nights and warm, dry days. Infected plants are covered with a white, powdery growth.
- If infected plant materials are to be composted, be sure that your compost heap is an active one in which plant material really decays. This is evidenced by the warmth generated by the decomposition reactions in the pile. Tossing plant materials on a rubbish pile will not destroy disease organisms, but hot composting them will.
- One of our readers sent us a delightful letter on homemade stationery that is worth manufacturing on your own if you have access to a copier machine. Enclose plants with interesting foliage shapes and colors, such as the miniature nerve plant *Fittonia minima*, between two transparent sheets to protect the bed of the copier. Duplicate as you would any other document. If color ink is available, it will be even more attractive.

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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