

The Green Thumb

Lawn and Garden News You Can Use

August 2006

Now is the Time to Plant The Fall Garden

Elizabeth Wahle, horticulture specialist

As summer starts to wind down, our supply of fresh vegetables from the garden starts to dwindle. So if you want to continue the gardening season, this is the time to plant a fall garden.

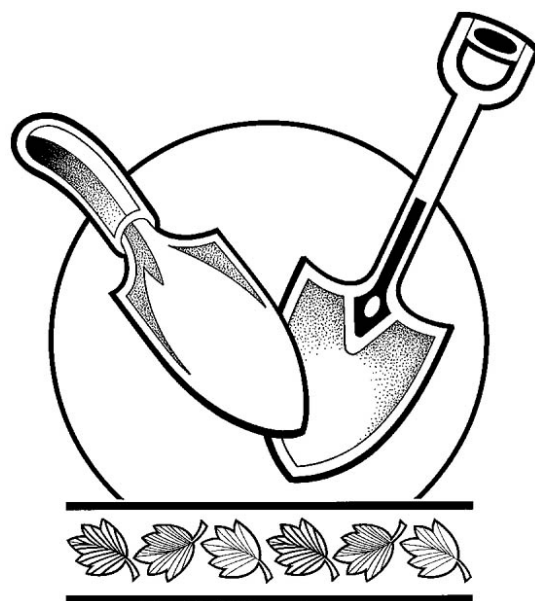
A fall garden has several advantages. It requires less time and labor because the soil has already been worked. Also, temperatures are usually cooler, making garden work more pleasant. Many vegetables like broccoli and cauliflower, are higher quality when grown in the fall. And, some vegetables such as kale and Swiss chard develop a better flavor after a frost.

Now that you're sold on the advantages of a fall garden, let's get started.

First, remove all previous crop residues. Then, till the soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches and incorporate 1 to 1½ pounds of all-purpose dry garden fertilizer like 12-12-12 per 100 square feet.

Plant the seed according to directions on the packet. Keep the soil evenly moist until the seedlings are up and growing; the top 2 inches of soil must be moist at all times to ensure germination.

If you're using transplants, plant them slightly deeper than they were growing in the container. Firm the soil around each



plant and water thoroughly with a starter solution. Make the solution by mixing 2 tablespoons of a soluble, high-phosphorus fertilizer in 1 gallon of water.

In Southern Illinois, direct seed cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts by August 15. Transplants of these vegetables can be set through the end of August.

Direct seed beets, carrots, snap peas, kohlrabi, mustard and turnips by Labor Day. You can plant spinach, lettuce, radishes and beets for greens through mid- to late September. Garlic and over-wintering spinach can be planted through October.

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Improving Your Lawn

David Robson, horticulture educator



This is the time of year to think about next year's lawn. A well-established turf area this fall means a better chance that it will survive next summer's heat, humidity and potential drought.

The end of August to Labor Day is an ideal time to renovate the lawn. Warm days, cool nights and expected fall rains favor turf establishment. Also, fewer weed seeds germinate in the fall which means less competition for new grass seedlings.

Soil preparation is just as crucial for seeding and sodding as it is for planting a tree, tomato or tulip. Although soil preparation is time consuming and can be expensive, it is the first step toward having a beautiful lawn. If there is one aspect NOT to overlook, this is it.

In areas where a decent stand of grass is present and weeds are few, you may be able to overseed the lawn with little preparation. Before seeding, mow the grass to a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch height to allow germinating seedlings enough light to support their growth.

Drop spreaders or slit seeders can be used to distribute seed over the area. Then water thoroughly, and the seeds will start to grow, filling in the turf.

Slit seeders are commonly used by many lawn care companies—you may be able to rent one at an equipment rental store. These seeders create a groove in the soil and deposit the seed into the groove. This method insures good seed-to-soil contact which is necessary for rapid germination and establishment.

If a drop seeder or spreader is used, lightly rake the area to work the seed into the soil.

For areas with more weeds than desirable grass, it would be wise to basically start from scratch. You can cover the area with black plastic to kill the plants, though this usually takes four to six weeks. Sod cutters

can be rented to remove the top inch of roots and grass crowns. Another option is to apply glyphosate (Round-Up, Kleen-Up) to the entire area.

Glyphosate will kill any non-woody plant it touches, but only what it touches. It isn't absorbed by the roots. The entire plant, including the root system, is usually killed. Death usually occurs within days although the visual symptoms may take a week to appear. This is why mid-August is the time to spray RoundUp. An August application gives you two weeks for the undesirable plants to die. Just make sure you take precautions to prevent spray drift on your flowers, shrubs and trees. As with any chemical, read and follow all label instructions before spraying.

After spraying, wait seven to 14 days and then remove the dead sod and weeds. A mechanical sod cutter can be rented. You can lightly rototill the area and rake out the clods. Just make sure you do not till the dead material into the ground because some of it may not actually be dead, or the dead sod could contain weed seeds. It's best to place the dead plant material in the compost pile.

Rototill the area to a depth of 8 inches. Incorporate up to 12 inches of organic matter such as compost or leaf mold. Rototill several more times until the organic matter is distributed and the seedbed is loose and fine. Rake out any large clumps or clods. Establish a soil grade lower in the middle of the yard.

Also, make sure the soil is dry before tilling. If you try to work the soil while it is wet, you may destroy the soil structure. A hardpan layer usually develops on the surface several weeks later, limiting water and air movement.

For more lawn care tips, pick up the handy *Fall Lawn Care Guide* from your local U of I Extension office.

Black Walnuts Worth the Effort

Elizabeth Wahle, horticulture specialist

Black walnuts lend a special flavor to many favorite recipes, and having a black walnut tree in the backyard can supply a large quantity of an otherwise expensive and hard-to-find nutmeat. For the most part, hickories, pecans and filberts easily separate from their husks. Walnuts, especially black walnuts, are another story. They require more work to remove the thick husk that surrounds the hull.

Allow black walnuts to ripen on the tree. In addition to drops, ripe black walnuts can be gently shaken from the tree with a long pole. Head protection is strongly advised. As the nuts ripen, the husks will change from solid green to yellowish-green. Press on the husk of the walnut with your thumb to determine ripeness. A nut that is ripe will show an indentation.

Methods that apply pressure to the nut's ends can be used to remove the thick husk. Be sure to don a pair of rubber gloves because dye from the husk can stain hands and clothing. One method is to place a small quantity of black walnuts on a protected hard surface, such as a concrete floor, and roll over them with a heavy object. A rubber mallet or hammer can also be used, but make sure you wear safety glasses. Some gardeners have even placed walnuts in the driveway and drove over them with a car to break off the husk. But, this practice can be dangerous. Nuts and broken shells may be thrown into the air by the tires, possibly causing bodily injury or property damage. This should give you an idea of just how tough the husk of a black

walnut can be! Husks can also be softened in a bucket of water and then peeled. A walnut huller or hand-operated corn sheller is another option. After the husks are cracked, they need to be completely removed from the unshelled nut. Failing to do so may result in stained nutmeat. Walnut husks should not be added to your compost pile because they contain a chemical, Juglone, which is toxic to many plants.

After hulling, rinse the unshelled nuts in a bucket. This is best done outdoors because of the staining properties of the residual husk. Only those nuts that sink should be saved. Nuts that are injured (by pests) or poorly filled will float.

The unshelled nuts must be cured. During the curing process, flavor develops and gets rid of the bitterness uncured nuts have. To cure, stack the unshelled nuts in layers two or three nuts deep on the floor or on wire trays in a shaded, well-ventilated area for two weeks. Check for adequate curing by breaking open a nut to sample. Unshelled nuts are dry enough to store when the kernel breaks with a sharp snap. If not cured properly, the kernel will mold.

When the unshelled nuts are dry, store them in a cool, slightly humid, well-ventilated area until ready to be cracked. Nuts can also be cracked and the kernels stored in the freezer. When properly cured, unshelled nuts or frozen kernels can be stored for a year or longer.

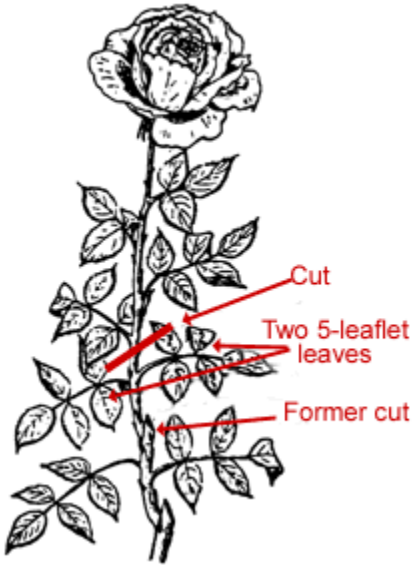


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Tips for Proper Rose Pruning

Properly pruning roses helps ensure a steady flow of color all season. The general rule of thumb is to cut the flower stem back to an outward-facing bud above a 5-leaflet leaf.



This “rule” applies best to plants that are vigorous. If the plant is weak or small, you may not want to cut off as much material. Each time you take this much wood you are removing a lot of the food-making ability of the plant. This method works well for most recurrent-blooming types of roses.

Starting at the flower, count the number of leaflets on each leaf. Some will have single leaflets, 3-leaflets or 5-leaflets. The 5-leaflet leaves have mature buds at their base that will produce a new shoot. Choose a 5-leaflet leaf in the middle of the stem and cut above it. Don’t cut back to the lowest. By choosing a mid-level bud you insure adequate foliage remains on the plant. Bring cut flowers inside to enjoy. Also, prune off faded flowers.

With rugosa and other shrub roses where hips are a part of the display, you may not want to prune off the old flowers. In this case, simply clean the spent blooms away with your hand, leaving the hips.

Flowers should not be cut after October 1—this allows the plant to harden off for the winter.



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