

Fall Garden Chores

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Q: What should I be doing in my yard during the fall?

A: Even though fall marks the end of the growing season for the summer garden you can successfully grow a late fall/winter garden here in the valley. And right now (early September) is the time to start your winter garden. Cool season vegetables – broccoli, kale, cabbage, beets, carrots, onions, etc. – if planted in August and September, will develop and produce either in the spring (broccoli, cabbage, carrots) or all winter long (kale, puller onions, etc.). Peas, lettuce, spinach and cilantro are best planted in mid-February. If you start seeds outside, be sure to shade them and keep them moist. Plant in a shallow trench, water thoroughly, plant your seeds, and then cover the trench with boards so the soil doesn't dry out. Check them every day and uncover once seeds germinate. You can also start seeds inside, in flats, and transplant the starts directly where they'll grow; these too should be shaded initially. Floating row cover works well for heavy frost protection.

This is also an important time to prepare your garden or landscape for next year. Fall is the best time for renovation projects in the garden, landscape or lawn. If you have a lawn there are several important steps to take as we enter the fall months to ensure a healthy lawn. Now is the time to fertilize, de-thatch, aerate, or remove lawn to reduce your water use in landscape. Slow release fertilizers are recommended and should be applied once in September and then again in October when the hottest days are past. Read the label and follow the application rate using caution to not over apply and burn your lawn. Remember if you have been grass cycling, using a lawn mower that can be set to mulch lawn cuttings back onto the sod, the need for fertilizer is reduced by thirty percent.

Remember to reset/reduce your irrigation times now and then again at the end of fall. If you have a seasonal adjustment on your timer it can be set to 70% for September and 60% for October.

The University of California IPM website: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF/> has detailed information about all aspects of lawn care and how to ensure you have a healthy lawn.

Autumn is a great time to plant new perennials, native shrubs or trees into the landscape. The soil is warm, and the root growth attained now combined with additional growth in the spring helps

the plant survive the heat of summer. Also, cool-weather annuals like snapdragons, pansies, and stocks may be planted to add a touch of color during the winter months. Before planting, amend the soil with compost and fertilize as needed.

Don't forget the annual clean up around the yard. Check and correct supports that are missing or girdling tree branches or trunks. Check drip lines for clogs. Do emitters need to be moved further away from the trunk of the plant as it has grown? Clean up plant leaves and other plant debris and prune out dead or diseased limbs.

Wait to prune trees, roses, and perennials until January or February. Replace mulch in your garden to maintain moisture, help with soil structure, protect from frost, and help with weed control. And, don't forget to clean, dry, and apply a lubricant to your tools. Finally stop to enjoy the colors, lights, and scents this autumn in your garden. "In the garden, Autumn is, indeed the crowning glory of the year, bringing us the fruition of months of thought and care and toil." Rose G. Kingsley, *The Autumn Garden*, 1905.