



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Helpful Garden Tips for October 2024 (October 5, 2024)

by Peyton Ellas, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

If plants spoke English, they would certainly be telling us they are glad autumn is here. Or would they? There are plenty of plants that love the summer heat and some that require the heat of summer to bloom in the autumn and on into winter. I love summer too and have mixed feelings as the weather settles in towards cold winter. Yes, I know I am in the minority. I don't dislike fall, and it is fun to see our summer dormant plants perk up again. Some of our spring-blooming native plants exhibit "false spring," and you may see a few flowers on redbud, ceanothus, and sage this month.

PLANTING: October is a busy month for planting and begins the main planting season for most ornamental trees, shrubs, perennials, vines, and ground covers. Autumn is the best season to plant some of our favorite California native species like manzanita, California Lilac (*Ceanothus*), and Silver Bush Lupin (*Lupinus albifrons*). Have your irrigation system ready before you plant. Those new transplants will need regular water for at least the first two weeks. Don't put your plant in a hole; leave an inch or two of the crown or center of the plant above the soil level. The planting hole should be a little wider than the nursery container. Top off with two or three inches of mulch after planting. You do not need to add fertilizer or amendment to the planting hole, but if you insist on fertilizing, use a timed-release granular product. Towards the end of the month, begin to plant spring-blooming bulbs such as daffodils and tulips, or you can wait until November. For bulbs, plant three times as deep as the size of the bulb, and don't overwater them. Plant native local wildflower seeds as the rains begin. Besides poppies, try clarkia, tidy tips, gilia, phacelia, and lupine. There are seed sources online for California native wildflower mixes.



In the vegetable garden, plant chard, spinach, turnips, beets, snow peas, carrots, cilantro, lettuce, and Asian greens from seed. Continue planting seedlings of greens, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and bulb onions.

MAINTAINING: Complete your annual yard clean-up, especially if you have planting beds or entire yards based on naturalistic styles. Don't be afraid to cut those spring-blooming shrubs back to a third of their size. Don't trim deciduous trees yet; we'll wait until winter for that. Deadhead roses one final time for a fall bloom. Divide perennials and replant. You can replant the iris or wait another month. If you can, grind up the plant trimmings and use them as mulch for the garden, or add ground-up plant debris to the compost bin. Don't use any plant material that has disease or pest issues; dispose of them in green waste bins in urban areas and the trash can elsewhere. But any healthy twigs, leaves, and old flowers make an excellent mulch in the garden. Use it wherever you can instead of having it hauled to the landfill. "Leave the leaves" is a catchy slogan being promoted Nationwide through the Xerces Society, Master Gardeners, and others, and it is good advice. Please let your plants help you lower their maintenance demands and keep them healthy and vigorous year after year.

If we have a few dry weeks, deep water your trees as they enter dormancy. Don't forget to adjust automatic systems (or ask your gardener to do it) to reflect cooler temperatures. In the mountains and foothills, wrap your pipes and remove and store faucet timers before the first frost.

You can apply preemergent herbicide this month to help prevent annual bluegrass, mustard, mallow (cheeseweed), clover, and purslane. Don't apply it where you plan to grow wildflowers or bulbs. Just like with grass species and edibles, we have two main seasons of weeds: warm and cool. We've already had some cool-season weeds germinating because of the August rain, but in October, they really start popping up. Be ready!

This is a good month to check your tree stakes in anticipation of winter winds. If the tree can stand up on its own and the root ball seems secure, remove the stakes completely and let it bend in a breeze; this will help the trunk gain strength. Stakes should never be right up against the trunk. Those stakes are for transporting from the nursery, not long-term. If you need to stake a tree, we have information on our website on how to do it properly.

Go easy on the nitrogen-heavy fertilizer as we go into fall to avoid frost burn of new foliage. This is the season, however, to fertilize your cool-season lawn if you still have one and lightly feed winter-blooming annuals, perennials, and container plants. Don't fertilize succulents or cactus.

CONSERVING: Chemical-free weed control and plant nutrition are possible. Schedule some time every week or a few times a week



to pull or hoe out small weeds as they emerge. Top dress your planting beds and even your lawn with compost. Add another layer of organic mulch to keep your soil healthy. "Leave the leaves" helps the soil, reduces weeds, and also provides winter protection for native solitary bees over winter. Create healthy soil, and your plants will be healthier and more resilient. Mulch, whether organic or inorganic (rock and decomposed granite), also decreases damage to the soil from rain and reduces both wind and water-caused soil erosion. Although we may need to manage many pest insects in the cool of fall, especially in our edible gardens, identify an unknown insect before you kill it or use insecticides. You may be surprised to find you have a wonderful ally in a beneficial insect. Consider planting a hedgerow in or near your garden or orchard to encourage and increase predator insects and pollinators. In the edible garden, if a plant is overtaken by a pest or a disease beyond easy control, it is probably best to remove the plant with the pest. Ornamental non-annuals can usually tolerate some damage and give you the time to solve the challenge. For many disease issues, cultural practices, such as increasing air circulation, weed control, and encouraging beneficial insects, should be considered part of the solution.

I will get over my sorrow about summer's end and join the rest of you in enjoying this month of transition to cold and rain. There's plenty to keep us busy, and fortunately, we can work outside most hours of the day during fall. Happy October!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Oct. 12, 11 am – 1 pm: Halloween Event at Tulare Public Library, 475 N. M St., Tulare

Oct. 12, 10 am – 2 pm: Luis Nursery Plant Clinic, 139 S. Mariposa Ave., Visalia

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

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