



The Garden Helper



Gardening Tasks and Projects for the Month of October

As the leaves change into their brilliant fall colors, and you awaken to a distinct chill in the air, you realize that winter is just around the corner. It's time to put the garden tools away for the year, settle back, relax, and wait for spring to arrive..... **WRONG!!!!** In most areas of the country, you will still have many tasks to accomplish... even after the first frosts.

Here are a few gardening tasks and projects that you can do this month to help keep your garden looking it's best for the rest of this season, and prepare for the long cold winter and upcoming spring.

Fall Care of Annuals, Perennials, and Bulbs

Right now spring may seem a long way off, and its not really on your mind. Remember the feeling you got as you went into your garden last spring, and there it was the first new growth of the new year??? Felt great, didn't it?

There is still time left to [plant perennial seeds and bulbs](#)! With a little effort at fall planting time, you will speed the timing of that first new growth by as much as a month. During the fall months, after soil temperature drops below 60°F., the bulbs of spring flowering Tulips, Daffodils, Hyacinths, Siberian Squill, Dwarf Irises, Anemone, and Crocus should be planted. Select healthy, disease free bulbs. Add Bone meal or Bulb fertilizer into the planting hole, as you prepare the soil. Most [spring flowering bulbs](#) should be in the ground by the early part of this month, with the exception of Tulips which can be planted up until early November .

Gladiolas, [Dahlias](#) and other [tender bulbs](#) should be dug **before the ground freezes**, and stored in a cool, dark area. Dahlia and [Begonia tubers](#) should be stored in a box of slightly moist peat moss. Gladiola corms can be stored in a paper bag without additional packing.

Be sure that new plantings and perennials which were divided and moved last month are kept watered if there has been insufficient rainfall. There is still time to set out winter [Pansies](#), [Ornamental Kale and Cabbage](#) and fall Mums. Keep a little color in the garden for as long as possible.

Watch your thermometer on colder nights. A windless, cold, clear night usually means a killing frost.... You can keep your [Chrysanthemums](#) and [Aster plants](#) blooming for quite a while longer if you take the time to provide a little frost protection for them. A small, simple frame covered with cheesecloth or an old bed sheet placed over your plants on frosty nights, can add a month or more of garden blooms. (*Don't forget to remove the cover as soon as the danger has passed!*) [Geraniums](#), Begonias, [Fuchsias](#), and other tender plants should be [brought indoors](#) or moved to a coldframe before the first frost.

Mulching fall planted perennials will keep the soil warmer longer, allowing root growth to continue, however, the plants do need time to harden off for winter. Spread a thin layer of mulch after fall planting, and then add a thicker layer once the ground has frozen.

[Collect and save seeds of Wildflowers](#) to sow next spring.

Shrub and Tree Care

Throughout the fall and winter months you can plant or transplant both evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs. During these months of dormancy you can do your shrub and tree moving with only minimal shock to the plants. If your Rhododendrons or other shrubs have root weevils, release [parasitic nematodes](#) to soil under the affected plants.

Fruit and Vegetable Gardening

Harvesting fruits and vegetables is the best part of growing them. As is often the case, you may have produced much more of certain type than your family can consume. Share the abundance of [Squash](#) and [Tomatoes](#) with friends and neighbors, and don't forget about your local food bank or second harvest organization! Although most fruits and vegetables are best when eaten fresh on the day they're picked, you can extend the season by freezing, drying, or canning.

Dig and divide congested clumps of rhubarb. Cut back raspberry canes that have grown too long, to prevent damage caused by winter winds. Some root crops, such as carrots, onions, and parsnips can be left in the ground in cold climates and dug up as needed. Apply enough mulch to keep the ground from freezing, and the crop will be kept fresh until it is needed.

After you have finished harvesting your summer vegetables, plant a cover crop of clovers, cow peas, soybeans, or vetch for the purpose of plowing under next spring. These nitrogen producing plants will provide good organic matter and food for your garden crops next year, as well as helping to control weeds over the winter.

Caring for your House Plants

Both [Christmas Cactus](#) and [Poinsettias](#) need to be kept indoors in a spot where they get ten hours of bright light and fourteen hours of **total** darkness, each day. Room temperatures should be around 65 to 70 degrees for the Poinsettias, but cooler (*around 55 to 60*) for the Christmas cactus. The longer your house plants were allowed to remain outside in the fall, the more shock they will go through when they are finally moved indoors. If you haven't brought them in yet, do it now!! Continue to watch for [insect](#) or [disease damage](#) and take the necessary steps to control the problem.

Odds and ends

You are probably sick of hearing it... but get those slugs!!! The fall rains have once again gotten [slugs and snails](#) moving through the garden. One last application of slug bait will eliminate a lot of slugs and prevent them from reproducing again this fall.

Result: Fewer slugs next spring.....

One last effort at weeding will help to improve the appearance of your garden throughout the winter. Any weed that you can eliminate from the garden this fall will possibly prevent thousands of weed seeds from sprouting in the garden next spring!

Keep lawn and garden raked clean of leaves and debris. Fallen leaves, old plant parts and grass clippings should be added to the [compost pile](#).

[Clean and oil your garden tools](#) for winter storage. Place some sand and some oil in a large bucket, then slide your garden tools in and out of the sand. This will do an excellent job of cleaning them, as well as applying a light coat of oil to prevent rusting.

Clean your gutters and downspouts to remove fallen leaves and other debris. Plugged gutters can cause serious damage to your home as well as your garden when the winter rain and snow arrives.

Send in your requests for gardening catalogs now, so that you will have something to read and ponder on those loooooong winter nights ahead.

Mark your perennials with permanent tags, or create a map showing their locations so you'll know where and what they are when they die back at the end of the season. This will help you to avoid digging up something you intended to keep when you plant bulbs and plants this fall and next spring.

The birds will soon begin their winter migrations. Give them a helping hand by providing them with some food for their long journey. No one likes to travel on an empty stomach, and you may even persuade a few of them to stick around for the winter, if they know they have a *reliable* food source!

Continue to watch for [insect](#), or [disease](#) damage throughout the garden, and take the necessary steps to control the problem.

Fall Lawn Care

Keep mowing as long as your grass is growing....