

David Barkley

Extension Horticulture Agent
Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Service

Inquiring Master Gardeners Want to Know...

Each fall a number of people call in or write wanting to know if they still have time to perform certain gardening and landscape chores they forgot to do in the spring and summertime. A gardener contacted us and wanted to know if it is too late to prune and fertilize some of the shrubs he planted last spring. More specifically, will it do any good to fertilize now or will it hurt the plants? He also wanted to know what chores he should be doing at this time of the year.

Tip pruning can be accomplished this month. Many evergreens are used in various Christmas decorations from both the foliage and berries. Favorites include the holly species, nandina, pines and cedars. Save the heavy (renovative) type pruning until late winter or early spring. Heavy pruning now would cause too much tender growth that will be prone to cold injury later this winter.

As for fertilizer, a lot of people think that fertilizing is a magic cure-all for all kinds of plant problems. Not so in this case. Same rule applies as for the pruning. Fertilizing plants this late into the season would cause them to remain tender throughout the winter. Since I don't have a crystal ball to tell just how nice a winter we will have, I must advise to wait until around April 15th (tax time) to fertilize your landscape plants and later for your lawn areas. Just remember, when it is time to pay "Uncle Sam" it is time to pay your plants with some fertilizer. Usually 2-4 pounds of 10:10:10 per 100 square feet will suffice.

Gardening Tips

- Now is the best time of the year to plant your landscape trees and shrubs.
- November is the time to select your Christmas Tree for the Holiday Season.
- Fall gardens may be harvested right on through the cold weather.
- The first freeze can occur in mid October but the average first freeze date is November 20th.
- Pecans often need a couple of really cold nights to open the husks that holds the pecans to the trees.
- Divide spring-flowering perennials in the fall.
- After the first killing frost, remove dead or yellowed foliage from perennials. Clean up your perennial beds and apply clean mulch to reduce the outbreak of diseases. While cleaning up the perennial bed remember that some seed heads will provide winter food for birds.
- Buy spring-flowering bulbs now but wait until December to plant them.

Winterizing the Herb Garden

- If treated properly, many herb plants will survive in the garden for a number of years. Others are sensitive to frost or severe cold weather and must be brought indoors, protected, or replanted each year. Annual herbs will be killed with the

first hard frost in the fall. Remove dead plants in order to minimize overwintering insects and disease problems. Some frost sensitive herbs, such as basil and geranium, can be brought indoors for the winter. Take cuttings to root or pot the entire plant.

- Many perennial herbs are winter hardy in all or parts of North Carolina and can be left in the garden. A few plants are marginally winter hardy; in a mild winter they survive but may die during a severe winter. They can be brought indoors to overwinter. Unless they receive adequate light indoors they may drop some of their leaves. Lemon verbena is a deciduous plant; it will lose all of its leaves indoors.

After a severe winter, some outdoor plants such as rue, sage, thyme, and southernwood, may appear brown and dead. The leaves may simply be dehydrated or the plant may be dead almost to the ground. Scrape the bark of a few stems to determine the extent of damage. If the stem is green, delay pruning until after new growth begins.