

SATURDAY

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Life

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Creating a beautiful fall garden.

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While the glorious reds, oranges and yellows of autumn leaves can be showstoppers, trees don't have to be the only beautiful things in your garden this fall. With the right plants, a bit of elbow grease and a little imagination, gardens can be lovely, vibrant places to enjoy on those upcoming crisp autumn days.

Upkeep

Watering: One of the most important things to do for gardens in the fall is to keep them hydrated.

"The main thing right now, especially with perennials, is to water. If you don't give perennials enough water now, they don't do well in the spring," said Betty Hoevel, an adult education supervisor for Five Rivers MetroParks. "Grass is not as important because it will come back pretty easily, but you need to be sure your flowers stay hydrated."

Watering is especially important this year, thanks to all of the dry weather we've had this summer. "You'll need to do a good, deep watering—not sprinkling—but gallons and gallons," said Patsy Vogel of Vogel's Nursery in New Lebanon. "You want to really try to get deep down through the mulch and dirt and on into the roots. That'll make everything look better."

Weeding: Just because summer is over doesn't mean that weeds are done growing. It's very important to keep up weeding, Hoevel said. "If you don't, they'll drop their seed and in the spring, the weeds will be there like gangbusters." Some weeds, like dandelions and thistles, will come back from the root, so be sure to pull out as much of the root as possible.

Remove dead leaves, branches: Also, keep a close eye for any signs of disease in your plants and remove any affected leaves. "Get rid of the leaves by raking them out and putting them in the trash. If you don't, the disease will be back next year," Hoevel said. Be sure to look up, as well. Check your trees for dead branches, especially ones that overhang your home. You'll want to get rid of them before winter winds or snow pull them down for you.

Care for roots: In late fall, when the



A beautiful A LITTLE WORK THIS

leaves come down, give plants a root stimulator or compost about an inch to half-inch thick in your perennial bed.

Prune, but not too much: Pruning is important, but don't overdo it. "Don't do heavy trimming on flowers because you'll lose the buds. You don't want to trim too heavily or you'll lose the blooms for next spring," Patsy Vogel said.

We have another month to month-and-a-half before the first hard frost, Hoevel said. "Don't cut more than one-third off of your petunias and inpatients. Fertilize them and you'll get more color."

And don't cut back your roses until the first week of December; in this part of Ohio, they just might bloom through Thanksgiving.

Compost: If you don't have a compost pile, start one, suggested Rick Kossoudji of North Dayton Garden Center. Mulch the leaves you've raked and throw them on a compost. "They'll decay and be ready by next summer for a top dressing of mulching," he said. "Try to save all your organic material and make a compost pile. It creates a black, rich earth full of earthworms. I can see a big difference in my plants when I use it."

Bring tropical plants inside: If you have tropical plants you'd like to keep

alive through the winter, they'll need to be brought inside. Water the containers heavily before you bring them into your home to help prevent also bringing in bugs or insect eggs.

But don't rush the process. "Don't bring them indoors until it's reliably 40 degrees at night and 50 degrees during the day," Hoevel said. "When we have the occasional night that is extra low, drag the plants into the garage." Once you do bring them inside permanently, put them in a room where you can get the most sunlight, but not near a heat register.

Fall is also a great time to sharpen your gardening tools and oil them to get ready for winter. Clean them with alcohol or handy wipes to keep from passing on disease. Make sure your garage and shed are tightly sealed against the upcoming cold weather.

Planting

Mums and asters are two popular varieties of fall flowers and can provide a nice pop of color to your fall garden.

When shopping for these flowers, be wary of buying them when they're in full bloom. If you do, you may only get two to three weeks worth of flowers. Instead,



new garden season

AUTUMN CAN PAY DIVIDENDS NEXT SPRING

look for plants that are just lightly budded. "They'll bloom at a more normal time and give you color later into the fall," Hoevel said. To keep color in your garden throughout the season, try buying a mix of mums, which are often labeled as early-, late- or mid-season bloomers.

When your annuals have stopped blooming, fill your containers with plants that have more foliage, such as coral bells, and put them in places where your annuals were. "It will give you a bit of a seasonal transition," Hoevel said.

Grasses and plants that resemble grass, such as sedges, can also make your garden feel lush. "Sedges come in weird colors — brownish, maroon and dark greens — and can give you a nice feeling for fall, especially with mums in deep purple," Hoevel said. "I'd tuck them into surprising places, such as along the front walk or in pots near the door."

Kossoudji, of North Dayton Garden Center, said winter pansies are a nice choice for fall. "You sow the seeds in July," he said. "Right now, they'd be about three inches tall. They're very durable plants and enjoy part sun and part shade. For many years in a row, we've had blooming pansies for Christ-

mas time." He also suggested planting something more practical: vegetables. Broccoli, cabbage, beets and turnips are all possibilities.

Other plants that have visual interest in the fall include crab apples, hens and chicks, and shrub rose — a big, viney plant with wonderful rose hips in bright oranges and reds.

Yvonne Dulphe, an education supervisor for Five Rivers Metroparks, said she prefers oakleaf hydrangeas to the popular mums. "They have great fall colors," she said. "Once the flower is done, the plant is leafy."

Evergreens are another example of foliage that will look good year-round. "People really miss the boat if they don't have some of the foundational landscaping," Dulphe said.

Don't be afraid to plant in the fall. "In this area, the only time you cannot plant is when the ground is frozen," Vogel said. "The nice thing is the plants are going to go dormant. Plant them and water them through Christmas. They'll root in and be ready for next spring."

Because of the extra rooting and anchoring time, trees and shrubs planted in the fall are more durable by the

time they hit a hot summer. "We try to promote fall as a time for planting anything, whether it's a whole new bed or you've pulled out shrubs," Kossoudji said.

Evaluate

Vogel recommended taking some time to think about what worked and didn't work in your garden this year. "Now's not a bad time to look around and see if you have holes or areas that didn't perform the way you wanted them to," she said.

Dulphe, of Five Rivers Metroparks, suggested taking pictures. "If you seek help for your garden, it's easier if you can show them what you had," she said. "Plus, it gives you some documentation for the winter when you sit down and evaluate your garden and start making your list for spring."

Go shopping

Fall is a great time to go shopping for garden supplies. "Everybody is doing sales in the fall," Vogel said.

Buy perennials, shrubs and trees or pick up bags of fertilizer and compost. Purchase packets of seeds.

Remember wildlife

Try populating your fall garden with birds.

When planning what to plant in your garden, consider what birds might enjoy, said Tom Hisson, education coordinator for Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm in Dayton. "You'll want to look for trees and shrubs with fruits and berries appealing to birds," he said. Fall migrating birds love spicebush, and hackberry is loaded with berries and is good for attracting robins and cardinals.

Hoevel recommend planting echinacea or black-eyed susans. "They look a little ratty, but it's nice to feed the birds," Hoevel said.

You can always position feeders filled with seeds. "It brings the birds closer to us so we can sit at a window and observe. It's a great way to connect with nature," Hisson said.

Accessorize

If your plants can't all be colorful, at least your pots can. Plant transitional plants like the ones mentioned above into bright or richly-hued containers. "Put one in a flower bed and get a nice spot of color," Hoevel suggested.

Pumpkins and gourds can make nice accents in a fall garden as well. Be sure not to water the pumpkins, however, and if you place them in containers, elevate them slightly or put stones between the container and the soil to avoid rot. You could also try tying cornstalks to lamp posts.

Give garden furniture an update for the season, too, changing out cushions or upholstery for fall-inspired ones. Hoevel encourages taking a look inside your house as well and seeing if you can't add in a few of nature's elements to your inside décor.

"Look out the windows and use some of the colors you see outside as accents inside. It creates the illusion that the room extends out into the garden," she said. "Especially when we get those bright full days, with that wonderful, intense color going on in your yard and home."

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