



CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

SEPTEMBER 2016 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

I would like to plant evergreen trees into my yard, is fall a good time?

Early autumn may be the best time to add conifers to your landscape. Small specimens are easier to plant and become more readily established. Mulch over the roots with three or four inches of wood chips or shredded bark, pulled back an inch or so from the trunks, to allow for air circulation. Water weekly unless there's abundant rainfall, right until the mulch and soil freeze.

Dear Master Gardener:

I want to have a healthy lawn next year, what steps I can take now to ensure it is thick and green next year?

First, check for small dandelion plants and other perennial broad leaf weeds in the lawn. Get rid of them now so they won't be around next spring. Dig or pull what you can and spot spray individual weeds or clusters that are scattered throughout the lawn. Where there are patches of weeds, you're better off killing the entire patch, then re-seeding or sodding once you are sure there are no live weeds left.

Next, core aerate the soil prior to fertilizing if your lawn is hard and clay-like or compacted from people or pets running over it repeatedly. This allows fertilizer, water and oxygen to penetrate the root zone more easily. Rent a machine that extracts plugs of soil, and then deposits them on the top of the grass. Let the plugs crumble in place to act as top dressing.

Finally, spread the first of two fall fertilizer applications this month. The second goes down late in October. Fall fertilizing ensures that your lawn will come back earlier, thicker and greener next spring. Water the granules into the soil to prevent runoff into gutters, storm sewers and eventually, our lakes and rivers. Sweep any granules that land on hard surfaces such as streets, sidewalks and driveways, and put them back in the package for future use.

Dear Master Gardener:

I have two Monarda plants in my yard that are about three years old. Can I plant seeds from them for more plants or do I have to split the roots? I don't know if they are hybrids.

Only native Monarda (bee balm) come true from seed. Propagating Monarda hybrids is easy by division. They should be divided every one to three years. The best time to divide them is in early spring just as the new growth is emerging. Dig up the plant and cut it into sections with a sharp spade. Sometimes you will see the growth on the soil surface and you can just pull the little plantlets apart.

Take divisions from the newest growth at the outside of the clump and plant them right away like you would a bare root plant.

Dear Master Gardener:

After harvesting, what is the best way to store the pumpkins and winter squash from my garden? Also, can I freeze pumpkin?

Harvest all types of squash and pumpkins before frost begins because fruit that has been exposed to freezing deteriorates rapidly. When harvesting vegetables, be careful not to break, nick, or bruise them. The less vegetables are handled, the longer they will last in storage. Harvest only vegetables of high quality. Rotting produce cannot be stored for very long, and could spread disease to other stored vegetables. Harvest pumpkins and squash when shells harden and store them in a cool and dry place. Squash and pumpkin deteriorate rapidly if stored at temperatures below 50°F. The best storage temperature is between 50 and 55°F.

Freezing is the only safe method for preserving pumpkin purees, butters and preserves. Select full-colored mature pumpkin with fine texture. Wash, then cut into cooking-size sections and remove seeds. Cook until soft in boiling water, in steam, in a pressure cooker, or in an oven. When soft, remove pulp from rind and mash. To cool, place pan containing pumpkin in cold water and stir occasionally. Pack into rigid containers leaving ½ -inch headspace, and freeze. Freeze these items for up to one year. Frozen pumpkin or squash is great to use in pies, desserts and as a vegetable. Thaw pumpkin and squash in the refrigerator - not on the counter - before using.

Dear Master Gardener:

I have an established asparagus patch. I quit cutting in mid- June. I have groups of several ferns that are 5 feet or taller. I recently noticed new asparagus shoots at the base of the ferns. Is there a safe time of year in the late summer/fall that I can harvest new shoots under the existing tall ferns?

Over-harvesting greatly reduces the vigor of the asparagus plant by seriously draining the sugar reserves in the crown. Next year's yields are determined by how well the asparagus is treated this year. Asparagus plants need stored nutrients and time to recover from harvests. They also need weed-free environments, moderate soil fertility, and adequate moisture to build up food reserves in their crowns.

After harvest, add nitrogen fertilizers according to soil test results. Since the asparagus plants will now be left to fern out, they need nitrogen to encourage maximum fern development, photosynthesis and storage of sugars in the roots for next year's crop. Research has consistently shown that the bushier the asparagus plant the better the yields will be the next season. Nitrogen should be incorporated very shallow.

September Garden Tips

- Divide peonies and irises.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs, such as daffodils, crocus, tulips and hyacinth, Add a touch of bone meal to the soil for better growth.
- It is time to bring houseplants and potted herbs back inside after their summer outdoors. Be sure to wash and isolate them in case they have insect or mite infestations from tiny eggs you cannot see. If none show up after a few weeks it should be safe to return them to their original places indoors.

- Add some chrysanthemums, mums and flowering kale into the garden for fall color.
- Bring Amaryllis bulbs indoors and put them in a dark cool place. Stop watering them. This is a resting period. Remove them in December, water them and put them in a sunny window for holiday blooming.
- Boxelder bugs and multicolored Asian lady beetles can make real pests of themselves congregating on the sunny south or west side of houses as temperatures drop. Some make their way into cracks and crevices to shelter from the elements. They're annoying, but basically harmless, just vacuum them up and empty them into the trash; they leave stains if you smash them.

University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardeners are trained and certified volunteers for the University of Minnesota Extension Service. All information given in this column is based on university research. To ask a question, call the Master Gardener Help Line at 218-454-GROW (4769) and leave a recorded message. A Master Gardener will return your call.

