

Garden Thymes

North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center

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FALL CAN BE A GREAT TIME FOR PLANTING

Because spring is the time for new growth, most people think of planting trees (including apple) and shrubs then. But cool temperatures and adequate rainfall make fall a good time to plant as well. The soil may be warmer and less damp than in the spring, and you may have more time to get the job done in fall. Fall planted stock does demand extra attention. It is much better to plant in September and October to allow plants enough time for root establishment before cold weather shuts down growth. Cold winter winds and sunshine cause plants to lose water from their branches, and the roots must be able to replace that water if plants are to survive. Evergreens, particularly broad leaved evergreens, are more susceptible to winter drying.

Select balled and burlapped or container grown plants rather than bare rooted stock for fall planting. Bare root plants should be planted in late winter or early spring while the plants are still dormant. Some species of plants do not adapt well to fall planting because they are more susceptible to winter damage. Sweet gum, red maple, birch, hawthorn, poplars, cherries, plum and many of the oaks are among the plants that are best saved for spring planting.

Plant trees and shrubs early enough in the fall for the plant to develop a good root system. Soil temperatures should be well above 55 degrees at a depth of six inches at planting time. This condition usually exists until late October.

Water plants thoroughly - give them about one inch of water per week. Continue watering until the ground is frozen, even after deciduous plants have lost their leaves. Adjust supplemental water based on your weekly rainfall. Wrap the trunks of thin barked, young trees in late November to prevent frost cracks, sunscald, and animal damage, but be sure to remove the wrap in March.

Ground covers and shallow rooted shrubs may be heaved out of the ground by alternate freezing and thawing of the soil that often occurs in winter. A two to four inch layer of mulch can help prevent wide soil temperature fluctuations. Apply mulch in late November or early December, after the plants are fully dormant and the soil is cold.

Sincerely,

Travis Birdsell
Extension Agent, Agriculture



NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION





FALL IN THE MOUNTAINS



One of the nicest things about living in the mountains of North Carolina is the ever changing seasons. Nature puts on one of its most spectacular displays as native trees and shrubs finish out the growing season in a brilliant display of fall colors.

Jack Frost usually gets credit for the beautiful colors, in reality fall color is controlled by both the plant's genetic factors and the environment.

Carotene and xanthophyll are yellow pigments

produced in foliage all year, along with chlorophyll, the green pigment. Short days and cool temperatures in autumn slow down the production of chlorophyll, the remaining chlorophyll breaks down and disappears. The yellow pigments that have been masked by chlorophyll appear. These pigments give the tulip poplar its clear yellow color. Redbud, larch, hickory, birch and witch hazel turn hues of yellow and gold.



Some plants produce anthocyanins (red and purple pigments) that may mask the yellow pigments. Some maples, dogwood, sweetgum, sourwood, oaks and winged euonymus seem to be on fire with red and purple.

Anthocyanin production increases with increased sugars in the leaves. A fall season with sunny days and cool nights increases sugar content of the leaves and intensifies fall reds. This also explains the two tone effect on green ash which exhibits yellow on leaves inside the tree and purple on the outside leaves where they are exposed to sunlight. It also explains the serviceberry, which may be red on top branches and yellow on bottom branches.

The tans and browns of oaks are caused by tannins which accumulate as the chlorophyll disappears.

Fall color starts in September with poison ivy and sumac and ends in late October with some oaks and weeping willows. Frost and freezing temperatures will stop the coloration process and blacken the leaves.



THE TOP FIVE COMMON MISTAKES IN LANDSCAPE PLANTINGS



Mistake #1: *Overplanting*

Small trees and shrubs are often planted too close together to get a “full” look. The result several years later is a crowded landscape that stresses plants. Plants must be removed or drastically pruned to reduce competition and increase air circulation.

Solution #1:

Resist the temptation to have an “instant landscape”. Know the mature size of plants and give them room, and time, to grow into their proper mature size.

Mistake #2: *Lawn areas are cluttered with trees and shrubs.*

Plants scattered throughout the lawn appear unorganized. They also create maintenance problems in terms of mowing, raking, and giving plants the amount of water and fertilizer they need.

Solution #2:

Group shrubs and trees according to their water and maintenance needs in mulched plant beds bordering the lawn.

Mistake #3: *Shrubs around the home are too tall.*

When plants grow too tall they cover windows and no longer enhance the home’s appearance. We usually try to compensate for this “mis-planting” by shearing to control the plant size. This constant shearing weakens and disfigures shrubs. It also creates extra work and yard waste.

Solution #3:

Select foundation plants with an ultimate (mature) size that fits their location. Selectively clip stray shoots to keep the plant neat and full.

Mistake #4: *Plants are planted too close to the house.*

Plants too close to the house have an unattractive “cramped” look. They create a maintenance nightmare when it’s time to repair or paint the house. Plants too close also restrict airflow around a house, increasing moisture and the chance of mold or mildew build up.

Solution #4:

Foundation or corner shrubs should be planted half their mature width plus one foot away from the wall. Therefore, a shrub that will grow to be five feet wide should be planted $3\frac{1}{2}$ ($2\frac{1}{2} + 1$) feet away from the house.

Mistake #5: *Bright colors are scattered throughout the yard.*

Brightly colored foliage, flowers or fruit attract attention. When brilliant color is scattered throughout the lawn it draws attention away from the focal point that the color was meant to emphasize.

Solution #5:

Concentrate color where accent is desired. The goal is to attract attention to focal areas of the house. Do not add too many colors to the landscape palette that it takes away from the overall visual effect. Color and patterns can be repeated in a landscape for cohesiveness.

STORING AND SAVING TENDER PLANT BULBS DURING WINTER



The time is coming to dig up tender, summer flowering bulbs, tubers, rhizomes and corms and store them for winter. Many gardeners add exciting, new plants to their gardens each year. Some of these may be “tender” plants, meaning that a dose of Ashe County winter will squeeze all the life out of them. Since tender plants are not hardy to Ashe County’s zone six winter, they freeze and die. Many lucky gardeners, myself included, may have had success overwintering these plants last year. I do not believe we will be so lucky two years in a row. Some examples of tender plants are Tuberous Begonia, Canna, Colocasia or Elephant Ear, Caladium, Dahlia, Calla Lily, Gladiola, Tuberose, and Freesia. For the sake of brevity, all underground roots and storage systems are going to be called bulbs in this article.

Here are 10 easy steps for saving tender bulbs:

1. Wait for the first heavy or killing frost. The tops should look sad, wilted and browned. Then try to dig on a warm day above 50 degrees so cold does not negatively affect your plant bottoms. Bulbs must be dug before the ground freezes.
2. Cut the stems off a distance above the soil level. Depending on the size of the plant, it might be one to two inches, or up to four inches. This can make digging easier. For bigger plants, the shortened stem serves as the handle to lift and move the bottom.
3. Carefully dig up the root structure. It is very important not to cut, nick or scrape the bulb. If in doubt about what lies below, use your fingers to dig and find the size of what you are digging. Plants with round structures like bulbs and corms are easier because they are symmetrical. Use the pads of your fingers or wear gardening gloves so you do not claw or scratch the exterior. No damage means there is a better chance of no rot in the bulb.
4. Gently remove the excess soil. It is not necessary to wash the root structures because you want them to dry as rapidly as possible. Check for shriveled or dead material or parts that are soft or oozing. The damaged material will not make it through the winter and could cause the good ones to decay. Sort and discard, if necessary.
5. Place into a container to bring indoors. Do not layer too many on top of each other. This is another way they can become bruised or scuffed. If the temperature outdoors is below 50 degrees, bring your buried treasures indoors rapidly after digging. None of these should spend much time outdoors or in a cold garage.
6. Bring into a heated building where the temperature is above 65 degrees to begin the drying process. Damp material that is stored can rot. This is very much like “curing” potatoes. The skin on the outside has to dry and toughen up for the long winter’s sleep. The process could take two weeks or more, depending on the size of the bulb. Turn the bulbs periodically to facilitate drying on all sides.
7. Stems should not be cut flush with the top of the bulb or rhizome. This allows rot to enter the bulb. In two weeks or when you think that the bulbs are dry, shorten the stems and check the inside of the stem to see that it is dry. If it is, then it is ready to store.
8. If labeling is important, you can put a sticker on the stem handle or use a marker and put information directly on the bulb. Pack similar bulbs together. You might label the outside of the container if there are many stored or multiple containers.
9. Use a container that is sturdy and will handle the weight of your plant material. It could be a strong cardboard box or a paper grocery bag. Use packing material around the bulbs. It could be wood shavings, sphagnum peat or Canadian peat, or many other things. These materials cushion the contents, but the peat moss helps to prevent decay because they are acidic. The packing material cushions the bulbs and if one decays, it is not lying on top of and ruining another bulb.
10. Store the packed box or bag in an area where the temperature will remain between 40 and 50 degrees all winter and the container is not in light. You want a safe, restful, and dark sleep for next year’s flower explosion.