

What to Do in October

By Jackie Sledge,

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It's the beginning of October, and the weather forecast for the next couple of weeks is wonderful! It looks like the highs may be in the 70s, the lows in the 50s and 60s, and a chance of rain several days so that makes me want to get outside and get started on the changes I planned for my landscape.

Where am I on those plans and the preparation for the changes? We had foundation work done several months ago so I salvaged some of my favorite plants before the digging and leveling started, and I managed to keep some of them alive in wading pools on the back porch during the scorching summer temperatures. Last week I reworked several beds and spent some early morning hours putting out 112 bags of mulch to help with weed control and to encourage moisture retention.

I am prioritizing the plans on my "to do" list and rely on the task lists from *Lone Star Gardening* by Neil Sperry and *Texas Garden Almanac* by Doug Welsh to keep me on track with what I need to do each month. Here are some of their recommendations for this month:

Planting Tasks:

- Plant cool season grasses for temporary winter lawn cover.
- Plant trees and shrubs so they have time to develop strong root systems before next summer. Consider plants with berries or leaves in different colors to add interest to the winter landscape.
- Dig and divide spring perennials such as phlox, iris, daylilies, coneflowers, hostas, and daisies.
- Plant bulbs such as daffodils and grape hyacinths. Tulips and Dutch hyacinths need to be chilled for at least 45 days and then planted in December. Be sure to check instructions for the bulbs you are going to add to your landscape to be sure you plant them at the right time and plant them correctly.
- Plant winter annuals such as pansies, snapdragons, pinks, dianthus, stock, viola, and ornamental cabbage and kale for fall and winter landscape color.
- Take cuttings of summer annuals and tropicals while they are still alive. Root them in loose, organic potting soil so you can replant them next year.
- Fall is the best time of the year to plant so take advantage of the cooler weather to start planting in your landscape.

Pruning Tasks:

- Prune damaged or dead branches from trees to prevent limb loss from winter winds or ice storms.
- Trim shrubs but save major reshaping for February before the start of spring growth.
- Prune perennials by removing dead leaves and stems to keep the gardens tidy.
- Mow grass until the first frost stops growth.

What to Feed:

- Feed warm-season grasses such as Bermuda and St Augustine early in the month.
- Feed annual and perennial landscape plants.

Troubleshooting Tips:

- Check for insect pests on plants that will be brought indoors for the winter. It is easier to treat plants while they are outside than after infected plants have been moved inside.
- Check the house for places insects can use to move indoors. Replace weather stripping around doors if needed.
- Remove weeds and grass in areas where you are going to plant new beds in the spring.
- Mulch flower beds, vegetable gardens, shrubs, and trees. Mulch preserves water in the soil, regulates soil temperatures, and lessens weeds.

Miscellaneous Tips:

- Make a note of what is growing in your beds and gardens so you can update your landscape plan.
- Make notes about what you like in landscapes around town. These are the plants you might want to add to your landscape.
- Don't bag and send fallen leaves to the landfill. You can manage leaves and use them in your landscape and garden in several ways. (1) Mow a light cover of leaves and leave them on the lawn. (2) Use leaves as mulch in gardens, beds, and under shrubs and trees. Shred a mound of leaves with a lawnmower before using them as mulch because shredded leaves decompose faster and are more likely to stay in place than unshredded leaves. (3) Use leaves in the vegetable garden in the furrows between rows as mulch, a walkway, and compost. (4) Till leaves into the soil for shrubs, flower beds, and vegetable gardens. Tilling leaves into the soil during the fall allows them to decompose before planting the area in the spring. Leaves turned into clay soil will improve aeration and drainage. Leaves turned into sandy soil will improve soil capacity to hold water and nutrients.
- Turn off the irrigation system for the winter. If there is no rain, turn on the system about once every 3 to 4 weeks to water thoroughly during the dry fall and winter months.

Be sure to have fresh water plus food available for the butterflies and birds.

Since I mentioned that fall is the best time of the year to plant, watch for information on the Big Country Master Gardener Association Fall Plant Sale. The online sale will begin the morning of October 11 through noon on October 13, and then we will have an in-person sale the morning of October 14 from 8:00 through noon. The plants available online and at the in-person sale are cultivars that will survive – and thrive – in our area.

If you have any questions, call the Taylor County Extension Office at 325-672-6048 or email us at mgardeners@yahoo.com. We hope you visit bcmgtx.org for all Big Country Master Gardener information and events, like us on BCMGA Facebook, and check out training presentations on BCMGA YouTube. We are here to help you.