

The Garden in November

By Rachel Anderson, Certified Professional Horticulturist

We've entered into the blustery wet month of November. I don't know about you, but I always feel energized and uplifted when the wind is blowing and the leaves are flying like spinning dervishes all around. The wildness of it makes me want to smile and get silly and before I know it, I'm dancing like a dervish, too! Which gets the dog barking with happy excitement, which in turn starts the ducks quacking and the chickens clucking in alarm, which causes the neighbors to poke their heads over the fence to make sure everything is all right. Embarrassing? Maybe. And, yes, everything is just fine, thanks for asking. It's just me celebrating autumn and getting my garden chores done all at the same time!

In the ornamental garden:

- Let the fallen leaves lay where they land (unless they're diseased). Leaves are an excellent mulch, and if left alone they will provide shelter for important overwintering beneficial insects and spiders. Remember, these little critters do good work for us in our gardens and they need a safe habitat over the winter. Plus, over time the leaves will break down and add nutrients to the soil and help improve soil structure.
- Leave as much as you can to rot on its own and remove only what you need to in order to satisfy your sense of tidiness. Hydrangea blossoms hold their rich color long into the season and many perennials, like eryngium, sedum, and echinacea, keep their form and lend interest to our gardens when we maybe forget to pay as much attention. Plus, they look lovely laced with frost.
- Leave your grasses alone for now too. Their tawny hues and graceful structure lend beauty and softness to the fall and winter garden.
- Drain and store hoses for winter. If you have an irrigation system, make sure to drain it too so there's no water left in the pipes to freeze.
- If you haven't planted any spring bulbs yet, make sure to get it done before the end of this month.
- It's still ok to do a bit of rearranging in the garden. Part of the beauty and fun of gardening is that nothing is static. You can change anything you want to in your garden. If you need or want to move perennials or shrubs, or even trees, fall really is the best time to do it. Plants are going dormant so there is less chance of transplant shock. Plus, you can count on more regular rainfall so you don't have to do as much hand-watering. Always hand-water right after you've moved something to be sure to give your plant a good start.
- Fall is also a really good time to create new garden beds or enlarge old ones. My favorite way to do this is by sheet mulching, mostly because it's so darn easy! It does take time though. Plot out where you want your new bed to be and then dig out around the perimeter, removing only about six inches or so of sod (lawn). Leave the rest of the lawn alone. Cover your entire bed space (including the part you dug out) with flattened cardboard or lots of layers of newspaper (I mean lots, like twenty pages thick). I prefer cardboard because it seems to smother the grass better. Water down the cardboard or paper to prevent it from blowing away before you have a chance to cover it. Cover the cardboard or newspaper with a 6-8 inch layer of compost. You can mix straw and/or leaves in with the compost if you want. Then just leave it alone for about 3 months or so. The grass under the cardboard and mulch gets smothered and rots and becomes beautiful garden soil that is ready to be planted in the spring. You can skip the digging out the perimeter step if you'd like. I always do it because it creates a nice crisp edge.

- Don't forget to pot up a few paperwhites and Amaryllis for the holidays. We have 10 different varieties of right now and the bulbs are absolutely giant! Size matters when it comes to bulbs and these promise lots of color. Paperwhites take about 6 weeks to flower and Amaryllis take about 8 weeks, depending on how warm or cool your home is.
- If you have plants in ceramic pots outdoors, remove the saucers from underneath them so they don't fill with water and then freeze. This will help prevent winter damage to your pots.

In the veggie garden:

- There's still time to plant garlic, however your window of opportunity is narrowing. Garlic should be in the ground by the middle of this month to allow time for the roots to develop before the ground gets too cold. If you can't or don't plant garlic now, it's ok. You'll have another opportunity to do so in the spring. It just means a different harvest time.
- Mulch your empty veggie beds with fallen leaves or straw (NOT hay, as this contains seeds of whatever that grass is and they will sprout in your beds).
- If you are growing asparagus, now is the time to cut the tops off down to the ground. Mulch to protect the crowns over the winter.
- Make sure to bring in all of your winter squash so that it doesn't rot. Wash away any mud, dry, and store in a spot where they'll stay cool and dry. Some people wipe their squash with a weak bleach solution to help prevent any mold from forming.

Pretty soon it will be too wet and too chilly to even consider working in the garden, so you've got to dance while the dancing's good, if you know what I mean.



About the author:

Rachel has been gardening since childhood, thanks to her mom, and has been part of the team at Christianson's since 2002. She's a Certified Professional Horticulturist with a passion for roses and vegetable gardening. Rachel and her family enjoy gardening together and now share their urban garden with a menagerie of ducks, chickens, two cats, and a dog.

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