



October Tips

TREES, SHRUBS and GROWDCOVERS

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- Fall is the best time of year for moving plants. Transplant deciduous trees and shrubs when they are dormant. Evergreen trees or shrubs, however, may be transplanted earlier in the fall, before they go dormant.
- Old, fallen leaves contain the disease inoculum for next year's plant infections. If you have disease-infected plants, prune out infected branches in the late fall and winter when the disease-causing organism is inactive. Remove any infected debris from around the plant's base and dispose of it.
- Looking to put some outstanding fall color into your landscape? Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica* 'Henry's Garnet') deserves the attention it attracts. It is a medium-sized shrub that spreads by rhizomes, ultimately forming a large stand if left unchecked, loaded with 2 to 6-inch-long racemes of fragrant, white, late-spring flowers lasting two to three weeks. Virginia Sweetspire prefers a moist, fertile soil, but is adaptable to full sun or part shade; has no major disease or insect problems; and is tolerant of low, wet sites.
- Start a family tradition by planting a tree or shrub in honor of a holiday, birthday, or anniversary. While celebrating the special occasion, you can also beautify your landscape and improve the air quality around your home.
- The next time you plant a tree, allow a child to hold the plant upright while the hole is filled. Years later, the tree will be a great reminder to the individual that he or she was so much smaller - or bigger - than the tree when it was planted!
- For an elegant, dramatic effect in your garden, plant a dwarf Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Dissectum') near a water garden. This small, slow-growing tree has an artistic branching pattern and intricately cut leaves that will provide some shade for fish while adding beauty to your water garden.
- For those trivia buffs out there -- What is 'spoonwood'? Native Americans used the wood of mountain laurel
- (*Kalmia latifolia*), commonly known as 'spoonwood,' to make eating utensils.
- Plant trees at least 6 feet away from sidewalks and concrete pools, so growing roots do not crack the concrete.
- When selecting trees for fall color, keep in mind that color is more strongly influenced by genes in the plant than by the environment. Trees selected in the fall when they are in full color can be expected to produce the same colors in future years. Red Maple cultivars that display outstanding colors include 'Red Sunset,' 'October Glory,' and 'Autumn Flame.'

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- You probably can name some annual and perennial flowers that are attractive to hummingbirds, but do you know some common trees visited by hummingbirds? Here is a brief list from The Dawes Arboretum: buckeyes and horse chestnut (*Aesculus* species), crabapple (*Malus* species), hawthorn (*Crataegus* species), silk tree (*Albizia julibrissin*), Siberian pea shrub (*Caragana arborescens*), and tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulififera*).
- The top of a shrub's or tree's roots should be flush with the ground, so the planting hole should be no deeper than the root ball.
- To minimize the look of open spaces between new shrubs, plant a low-growing ground cover, such as bugleweed or winter creeper.
- Your trees and shrubs have begun to harden for the upcoming cold weather. To encourage this, remove mulch from around the stems of shrubs and trees.
- Transplant shrubs and trees safely, the professional way, by wrapping the root ball in a large piece of natural-fiber burlap. Secure the wrapping with 4-inch nails. Then move the balled and burlapped plant to its new location. Be sure to remove the wrapping from the root ball.
- October and November are generally considered the best months to plant trees and shrubs. Garden centers and nurseries usually stock a good selection of woody plants at this time of year. Select some accent plants for your landscape that will provide autumn colors. Trees that turn red include dogwood, red maple, sweet gum, and red or scarlet oak. Shrubs with red fall foliage include viburnum, winged euonymus, and barberry.
- The particular shade of orange, red, or purple fall color that is developed by the pigment anthocyanin in leaves is related to the acid or alkaline condition of the sap of the plant. If the sap is acidic, the color will be orange or red. With neutral sap, the pigment turns light purple. When the sap is alkaline, a dark purple or blue color is evident.
- Conifers that have poor color or weak growth may respond to fertilizer applied between mid-October and mid-March.
- While you can still identify them easily, prune dead and diseased branches from trees and shrubs.
- Light pruning of both needle and broadleaf evergreens is recommended in late fall to encourage a strong framework to help the plant overcome any snow damage. Remove any weak or crowded branches.
- In deciding on new trees or shrubs to plant around your home, remember to select varieties with a mature height to fit the desired location. This will greatly reduce pruning and other maintenance in the future.
- To protect young trees against deer damage, there are a number of deterrents you can try. Remember, deer will become accustomed to any object, so alternating items will help. Hang bars of strong-scented soap, mesh bags filled with human hair, paper bags of dried blood (bloodmeal), or strips cut from white plastic bags on trees that are likely to be attacked.

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Chemical deer repellents also can be applied. Be sure to reapply any chemicals after two to three weeks of normal weathering.

- Make a note of plants displaying outstanding fall colors as you drive along city streets and the surrounding countryside. You may wish to incorporate some of them into your own landscape. Fall color often can be enjoyed for much longer than the plant's flowers in the spring. For this reason, it may be more desirable when selecting trees and shrubs for landscape use to plan greater emphasis on their fall features.
- If your climbing roses are in an exposed location, tie them up firmly with broad strips of rags so the wind will not whip them against the trellis and bruise the bark.
- Use cold frames to over winter cuttings of trees and shrubs and perennial seedlings started in mid- to late summer. Bulbs prepared for forcing also can be stored in cold frames until time to take them indoors.
- It is too late this year to prune roses because they would become subject to winter injury. However, the rose garden should be raked and cleaned to prevent black spot and other diseases. Additional mulch should be added after the ground has frozen.
- Water evergreens thoroughly before the ground freezes. Evergreens continue to lose water by transpiring during the winter, but when the ground is frozen they cannot replenish the water.
- Pick bagworms from evergreen shrubs. This will eliminate the spring hatch from overwintered eggs.
- Do not become alarmed if your yews, pines, arborvitae, and junipers begin to shed their interior needles. It is natural for them to do so at this time of year.
- White pines are shedding their older needles now. Rake them up and use as mulch on azalea, rhododendron, andromeda, and camellia.
- In fall and early winter, don't forget to water new trees and shrubs to increase winter hardiness. Continue until the ground freezes.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist

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