



September Tips

LAWNS and LANDSCAPING

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- It is time to apply herbicides to your lawn for winter annual or perennial weeds that germinate or form rosettes in turf during the fall. Check herbicide labels before using and select the appropriate chemical for the weed types and lawn type in your yard.
- Put the right plant in the right place - with the right soil, moisture, and sun or shade conditions, your plants will be healthier, and many will not need irrigation.
- For quick mulch, cut the plants in your vegetable and flower gardens, but leave the material in the garden to prevent erosion and provide organic matter for the soil. Use hand pruners, hedge shears, or a sickle to chop the plants into mulch-size pieces. Just be sure that the plant material has no disease or insect infestations.
- Try planting ferns to fill in between and beneath shrubs, trees, grape arbors, and other shady spots. Plant in early fall for best results.
- Don't retire the lawn mower when the growth of your lawn slows down this fall. As long as the grass continues to grow, it should be mowed.
- Make a long-range plan to gradually convert your current landscape to the one you desire. Don't pull out any ornamental plantings until you have the time and resources to replace them.
- Don't allow leaves to accumulate on the lawn. Rake them up regularly and store in a pile for use as mulch in your garden next summer. If leaves accumulate on your lawn and become matted down by rain, they may kill the grass.
- Dig new garden beds for next spring, incorporating organic matter, such as leaves and leave the soil rough to allow good water penetration. Freezing and thawing will break up heavy clay soils. Plant a cover crop, also called a green manure, to increase the soil's organic matter content.
- Wood ashes contain phosphorous, calcium, and potassium and can be placed on the garden, flower beds or spread on lawn, but don't overdo it. Avoid ashes on acid-loving plants, such as azaleas and blueberries, because ashes raise the soil pH.
- When landscaping for energy efficiency, choose evergreens for the north and northwest side of the house where they will block winter winds without limiting winter sun. Block early morning and late afternoon summer sun by planting deciduous trees to the east and west of the house, including the southeast and southwest corners. Don't plant shade trees to the direct south of the house; the summer sun is so high in the sky it will shine onto the house over all but the tallest trees, and the trees would block cooling, southernly breezes.
- Early autumn is the best time of the year for the sowing of grass seed. Grass sown in spring is often killed by hot, dry, summer weather. For more vigorous growth, spread a very thin mulch of clean straw over newly seeded areas. The straw shades delicate seedlings from the hot sun and helps preserve moisture in the soil, yet lets enough light through for germination. By the time cold weather arrives, the grass is fairly well established and ready to grow and thicken early the following spring.

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- Healthy green grass outside the windows of your home can cool the breeze off hot pavement by as much as 10 degrees F.
- Fall is usually cool and moist and a good time to plant trees and shrubs. Research has shown that roots will continue to grow until the soil freezes, which is about Thanksgiving in Virginia. This is true for both evergreens and deciduous plants.
- Lawns should be fertilized in late September or early October. Consult your local Extension agent for the most recent recommendations.

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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