

A checklist for your October garden

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

The first genuine cold front arrived Saturday night, and I was ready for it. I think it will take several days of this cool weather to cool my body down from the heat stored over a warm summer season. My home air-conditioning unit got some nighttime rest. But this is the Texas Gulf Coast and we should expect some ups and downs in temperatures before more consistently cool fall weather prevails.

Though it may seem that I am complaining — not so. I actually enjoyed mowing the lawn this summer as it denoted that there was sufficient rainfall this year to grow the grass in the first place.

The pleasantly cool weather over the past few days has not gone unnoticed nor unappreciated by local residents. In contrast to our hot, humid summers, fall weather is down right what the “doctor ordered” to lift the spirits. And while you’re in such good spirits, be sure to be mindful of October’s garden checklist as follows:

Save caladium tubers: Caladiums are getting past their prime with the onset of cooler weather. If you plan on saving caladium tubers for another year, be sure to dig them up before the top growth disappears — those tubers can be very difficult to locate after the top growth is gone. Allow the tubers to air-dry for 7 to 10 days in a well-ventilated



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

October is an excellent time to plant container-grown ground covers, shrubs and trees. Lots of gardeners attending last Saturday’s Ornamental & Perennial Plant Sale should be busy over the next several days finding the perfect spot in the landscape for their selections.

but shaded area.

After drying, gently remove any attached leaves and large soil particles from the tubers then store in dry peat moss, vermiculite or similar material in a well-ventilated container. Pack so that the tubers do not touch each other. Dust with an all-purpose fungicide to help prevent decay. Store the tubers in an area where temperatures won’t drop below 50 degrees F.

Plant cool season vegetables: Transplants of broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cabbage can be set out this month. Seeds of beets, carrots, kale, lettuce, mustard, radish, and turnips

can be planted and cloves of garlic can be set out throughout October.

Control cool season weeds: Most lawn weeds that we see during late winter and early spring actually sprout in the fall. They are cool season weeds and, in fact, their germination is stimulated in the fall by the onset of cool temperatures. They grow during winter if temperatures stay warm enough, then produce a crop of seeds in the spring and die out when hot weather arrives.

Use of pre-emergent herbicides to control cool season weeds is effective only if



October 10, 2012



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.



properly timed, i.e., they should be applied very soon after the onset of relatively cool weather conditions. Several pre-emergent herbicides are approved for lawn use and are sold under a variety of commercial labels. Check with your area garden center or feed store for available products. Always read and follow label directions.

Divide spring flowering perennials: As perennials mature they often need dividing to encourage vigor and continued performance. Luckily the plants provide us a few clues when it is time to divide them such as smaller leaves and fewer flowers, weaker stems, and/or center growth becoming open with primary growth occurring along the perimeter of the clump.

The general rule for dividing perennials is to divide opposite their flowering time. So a plant that flowers in the spring can be divided after it flowers, usually in late summer or fall.

I divided my giant agapanthus over the weekend. They were becoming a bit overcrowded and it turned out to be a labor intensive project — but I now have a lot more giant agapanthus for even more beautiful blooms during late spring.

Early October is a good time to divide these types of perennials. To enhance the survival rate of your new divisions, re-plant them in well-prepared soil with generous amounts of organic material worked into the top 5 to 8 inches of soil.

Brown patch in lawns: Lawn grasses, especially St. Augustine, have taken a pounding this year — dry spells, fungal leafspots, white grubs, etc. With the onset of fall and cooler temperatures, a fungal disease known as brown patch will be a problem in some lawns.

This fungal disease is most easily controlled when symptoms first become evi-

dent. If brown patch was a problem in previous years, then it's especially likely to again be a problem this fall given the stressful growing conditions this year.

Brown patch is primarily a cool-weather problem so do not be confused by brown areas of the lawn that developed during the summer which may be the result of other fungal or insect problems. Several fungicides are available that will provide good control of brown patch when applied according to label instructions. These include those fungicides with the active ingredients myclobutanil (Spectracide Immunox Lawn Disease Control, etc.), propiconazole (Ortho Lawn Disease Control, etc.), thiophanate-methyl (Scotts Lawn Fungus Control, etc.) and triadimefon (Bayer Advanced Fungus Control for Lawns, etc.).

Plant shrubs and trees: This is an excellent time for planting container-grown ground covers, shrubs and trees. Thanks to our mild winters, trees and shrubs planted now will have several relatively stress-free months to establish a good root system before hot, dry weather returns.

