

# Gardening chores as you enjoy cooler weather

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*

The record drought conditions and warm temperatures of the 2011 summer have at last given way to cooler fall weather. So, enjoy the beautiful weather and while you're at it, be sure to perform any needed activities in the home garden and landscape as follows:

- Make periodic inspections on recently transplanted landscape trees and shrubs for soil moisture level. Their root systems will not become well-established for some time.

While summer's heat wave might finally have loosened its grip and we have received some very welcome showers during the past few weeks, we still are under drought conditions. During extended periods of dry weather conditions, be sure to water new transplants regularly to avoid stressing plants.

- Oaks and other trees in the landscape soon will start dropping their leaves. Start collecting leaves for the compost pile. Be sure to have extra soil available so that each 6-inch layer of leaves is covered with several inches of soil. Always moisten the layer of leaves thoroughly before adding the soil. Add about one pound of a complete lawn or garden fertilizer to each layer of leaves to provide the necessary nitrogen for decomposition.

- Cool season vegetables to plant include English peas, radishes, spinach and turnips



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

throughout November, while garlic cloves and carrot seed should be planted by mid-November.

- One of the most difficult tasks for the fall gardener is thinning seedlings. Gardeners tend to overplant vegetable seeds, especially small-seeded ones like carrots, radishes and most salad greens. Seedlings should be thinned before they attain 2 to 3 inches height according to the spacing distance recommended on the seed packet. If you do not thin them, you likely will be disappointed by lack of production.

- This is an ideal time to plant cool-season annuals to provide color in the landscape. There are many types of annual flowers that bloom only in cooler weather. Pansies are a favorite choice as they are on the list of Texas' top-

selling annual flowers.

Pansies are hardy and will bloom during a long season. The old-fashioned face varieties have been steadily improved for better garden performance, and many new varieties with solid or bi-colors without a face are available.

Pansies are available in a wide array of colors ranging from bold yellows, oranges and reds to pale pastels. Miniature pansies also are becoming popular.

- Other cool season annuals to plant to add color to the landscape include alyssum, flowering cabbage and kale, petunias and snapdragons.

- Don't get in a hurry to prune woody plants. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.



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- Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants now to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well-lighted window.

- 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.

- Dry weather conditions have prevailed during the past few months. Keep azaleas, camellias and other spring-flowering shrubs well watered to help ensure a bountiful bloom display.

- Bring late-blooming plants, such as decorative kalanchoes or Christmas cactus, indoors so they can finish flowering in the warmth of the house.

- Chill tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator until mid or late December before planting. These bulbs need to be chilled for four to six weeks before planting. The lower part of the refrigerator is best. Do not leave bulbs in airtight plastic bags during refrigerated storage.

- November is a good time to reduce the insect and disease potential in next year's garden. Clean up the garden by removing all plants that have finished producing.

- In order to increase your stock of clumping perennials, divide spring and summer bloomers during the fall and winter. (Those which are fall bloomers can be divided in the spring, or season opposite to bloom time.)

Most perennials left in the ground in the same place for more than three years are likely to become overgrown and overcrowded. Passing favorite plants along to friends or trading for a prized plant is a favorite part of perennial gardening.

