



PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

One of the most difficult tasks for a gardener is thinning seedlings in the vegetable garden. Gardeners tend to over-plant vegetable seeds, especially small ones like carrots, radishes (shown above) and most salad greens. Seedlings should be thinned according to the spacing distance recommended on the seed packet before they are 2-to-3 inches high.

Upon awakening on Thursday morning last week, I noticed that the real-time temperature on the house thermostat was two degrees below the set point temperature. Perhaps after several false starts, fall has at last arrived.

However, I know we are in the Upper Gulf Coast region of Texas and we are likely to get a few more rounds of non-fall like weather. The upside to this matter is that we

have very mild winters in most years. Another matter is more definitive: day length is becoming ever so shorter with each passing day.

As the fall season settles in, take advantage of the cool days and the slower pace of gardening to prepare your plants for winter. Be sure to perform any needed activities in the home garden and landscape and check our upcoming educational programs as follows:

lows:

**Citrus Seminar:** This year's Home Citrus Production Seminar is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 19, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park. There will not be a show of locally grown citrus for this year's program. Additional details will be provided in a later column.

**Compost Leaves:** Oaks, pecans and other trees



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in the landscape will soon 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 a shallow layer of soil (or compost). Always moisten each layer of leaves thoroughly before adding the soil. Shredding the leaves beforehand with a lawn mower will help speed the process of decomposition, but it is not essential.

**Inspect landscape trees and shrubs:** 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 rainfall amounts have been very generous in most areas, be sure to water new transplants regularly to avoid stressing plants in the event an extended period of dry weather conditions occur.

**Plant cool season vegetables:** Cool season vegetables to plant include English peas, radishes, spinach and turnips throughout November.

**Thin seedlings:** One of the most difficult tasks for the fall gardener is thinning seedlings. Gardeners tend to over-plant vegetable seeds, especially small-seeded vegetables like carrots, radishes and most salad greens. Seedlings should be thinned according to the spacing distance recommended on the seed packet before

they attain 2-to-3 inches height. If you do not thin them, you will likely be disappointed by lack of production.

**Cool-season annuals:** 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 over 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 now available.

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

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

**Sanitation in the garden:** November is a good time to reduce the insect and disease potential in next year's garden. Remove all dead or diseased plants. This will help ensure that disease-causing fungi do not have a place to overwinter.

**Divide perennials:** 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 3 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.

**Plumeria:** As the days lengths become shorter, some lower leaf yellowing and drop is normal for plumeria plants. Some plumeria varieties may produce blooms into December when weather conditions are favorable. But watch out, an early frost can damage or kill the plant. Plumeria stop growing when the average ambient temperature drops below 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Stop fertilizing and reduce water to encourage plants to go into its natural dormant period. It is difficult to predict the weather and therefore it's difficult to give a date by which your plumeria should be safely stored for the winter. By all means, if temperatures are expected to fall into the lower forties, the plants should be protected.

