

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



October 31, 2018



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>.

One of the most difficult tasks for a gardener is thinning seedlings in the vegetable garden. Seedlings should be thinned before they are 2-to-3 inches high according to the spacing distance recommended on the seed packet.

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

While the calendar indicated that the fall season arrived several weeks ago, gardeners had to wait a while for some evidence. I experienced two preliminary forms of evidence last week: 1) I turned the heater on in my car last Thursday when driving home, and 2) I then turned the heating unit on

at home before retiring to sleep.

Experienced gardeners know that patience is required for waiting on fall to settle in as daytime temperatures climbed into the upper eighties over the weekend. I had to turn my car air conditioner back on as well as my home air

conditioner over the past weekend.

As the fall temperatures settle in with consistency over the month of November, 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 as follows:

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.

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 over-winter.

Divide perennials: 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.

Compost leaves: Oaks, pecans and other trees in the landscape will soon start dropping their leaves. Pound for pound, the leaves of most trees contain twice as many

minerals as composted manure. Composting leaves is an excellent way to give your compost and your garden a boost.

Tree leaves that accumulate in and around your landscape represent a valuable natural resource that can be used to provide a good source of organic matter and nutrients for use in your landscape. You may complain, as you lean wearily on a leaf rake, that your neighborhood outdoes any forest, but be thankful. Hang onto your leaves. And if your neighbors don't want them, hang onto theirs as well.

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.

It makes no sense to send valuable treasure to the dump. Therefore, leaves should be managed and used rather than bagged and placed at curbside to be picked up and hauled to landfills.

