

## October Gardening Tasks

"Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower."

— Albert Camus

This past weekend I took a break from my gardening tasks to enjoy the spectacular fall color in the Baraboo Bluffs area. Unfortunately, that means I will have to try and squeeze in some gardening tasks after I get home from work this week. Even though we've had some frost, there are still plenty of gardening tasks to be done before the snow flies. Hopefully, this pleasant weather will last a few more weeks so I can get things down without having to work in the cold. Here are just a few of the gardening tasks to accomplish before it gets too cold.

In your perennial beds, finish planting spring-flowering bulbs like daffodils, crocus, and tulips and summer-flowering bulbs such as Asiatic and Oriental lilies. You might want to consider saving some for indoor forcing. Bulbs can be planted up to six weeks after the first fall frost so there is still plenty of time. If you have existing bulb beds, fertilize them with a balanced fertilizer. You can also seed perennials such as Oriental and Iceland poppies, primrose, scabiosa, phlox, pansy, and penstemon. Just make sure you mark where you plant them so come next spring you don't accidentally weed them.

If you saved a poinsettia from last Christmas, you can get the bracts (or leaves) to change color by placing the plant in darkness for 15 hours (overnight) for eight weeks. Keep it cool (55 degrees F) at night and the soil moist. By Christmas, you should have a lovely red poinsettia.

Start cleaning up the vegetable garden so it's ready for spring planting. After you finish harvesting your various vegetables, remove the old stalks to prevent insect and disease problems next year. You can also spread fresh manure, incorporate it into the soil, and mulch with straw. This is the only time you should apply fresh manure as it will have time to break down before planting next spring. You can always use composted manure if you don't have access to fresh manure. Mulch Brussel sprouts to prolong the harvest. Divide rhubarb plants into quarters and replant to rejuvenate them. Water any other plants you still want to keep in the ground to help improve their cold tolerance. It's also time to plant garlic. You'll want to plant them in rich, well-drained soil about 5 inches apart and 1 to 2 inches deep, pointy end up. Crack them apart into individual cloves and choose the largest cloves if you want larger bulbs. You can plant either hardneck or softneck, but hardneck varieties tend to be more winter hardy. Once you're done planting, cover them with 4 to 6 inches of straw.

Resume pruning oak trees without the worry of oak wilt. Rake, chop, and compost leaves. Consider running them over with the lawn mower and leave them on the lawn to break down and fertilize the lawn. You can still plant dormant deciduous trees and shrubs until the ground freezes. If you do plant a tree or shrub, spread a 2-inch layer of mulch to reduce root damage from freezing and thawing. Water evergreens and foundation plantings before the ground freezes. Finally, protect your wood ornamentals and fruit trees from mice and other rodents. Rodent guards need to be placed at the base of the trees but also tall enough to account for snow fall. Rake and dispose of any fallen fruit around your fruit trees to prevent future pest problems.

The list may seem long, so remember to take a break every now and then and enjoy the glorious autumn color. It'll be gone before you know it.

This week's article is written by Jeannie Manis, a Wisconsin Certified Sauk County Master Gardener Volunteer. If you have any gardening questions, please contact the Extension Sauk County by emailing to [tripp@wisc.edu](mailto:tripp@wisc.edu) or calling the University of Wisconsin Madison Division of Extension Sauk County office at 608-355-3250.