



## Garden Guide

Things to do this month

Plant peonies now, but make sure the crowns are buried only one and a half to two inches below ground level. Planting them deeper than 2-inches may keep them from blooming.

Root cuttings from annual bedding plants such as begonias, coleus, geraniums and impatiens. These plants can be overwintered in a sunny window and provide plants for next year's garden.

Before the first frost dig up caladiums. Allow them to dry and store them in a dry place for the winter.

Perennial phlox can be divided about every third or fourth year. Divide big clumps of perennial phlox into thirds. Early fall or early spring are the best times to plant or transplant them.

Divide lily-of-the-valley.

Select accent plants for your landscape that will provide autumn colors. Trees that have red fall color are flowering dogwood, red maple, sugar maple, Norway maple, red oak and scarlet oak. Shrubs with red fall foliage include sumac, viburnum, winged euonymus and barberry.

Allow plants to finish the summer growth cycle in a normal manner. Never encourage growth with heavy applications of fertilizer or excessive pruning at this time. Plants will delay their dormancy process that has already begun in anticipation of winter in the months ahead. New growth can be injured by an early freeze.

Tree wound paints used after pruning are no longer recommended as they can slow healing and may promote decay.

If pesky seedlings of woody plants, such as elm, mulberry, hackberry or maple are found growing in your yard, remove them as soon as possible. If left to long they will take over gardens and other landscape plantings.

Rake up leaves, twigs and fruit from crabapple trees and dispose of them in the trash to help control apple scab disease.

Water newly planted trees and shrubs to provide sufficient moisture and prevent winter damage. Add a 2-inch layer of a organic mulch such as shredded bark around the base of plants to retain soil moisture and regulate soil temperature.

Wood ashes contain phosphorous, potassium and calcium. It can be placed on vegetable gardens and flower beds.

Save seeds from favorite flowers such as marigolds by allowing the flower heads to mature. Lay seeds on newspaper and turn them often to dry. Store the dry seeds in glass jars or envelopes in a cool, dry, dark place.

Hot peppers will keep best if stored after they are dry. Thread the peppers on a string to dry. Hang in a cool, dry place.

Pot up chives, parsley and other herbs to extend the growing season in the house.

Pears should be picked at the hard ripe stage and allowed to finish ripening off the tree. The base color of yellow pears should change from green to yellow as the fruit approaches maturity.

Be sure to keep strawberry beds weed free. Every weed you pull now will help make weeding much easier next spring.

Do not wait for frost warnings to move your plants indoors. Temperatures of 45° F or lower can damage many tropical house plants.

Collect okra seed pods, gourds, sumac seed heads, rose hips and other suitable materials for dried arrangements. Air dry these materials in a dark, cool location.

Fall is a good time for improving your garden soil. Add manure, compost and leaves to increase the organic matter content. (MJF)

## Planting Under Established Trees

Establishing and maintaining healthy herbaceous plantings under trees can be difficult. Mature trees produce large quantities of surface roots, especially when grown in a landscape that receives frequent, shallow watering from sprinklers. These fibrous roots compete for nutrients and water with under-plantings.

Some homeowners try to escape the problem of bare soil underneath mature trees by installing raised planting beds, however, this practice is strongly discouraged for several reasons. First, adding soil on top of a tree's root system reduces the amount of oxygen in the

underlying soil, oxygen essential for root health and growth. Often trees will begin a gradual decline, after the installation of a raised planter that does not become noticeable for 2 to 5 years. Homeowners also are often frustrated when these beds quickly fill with dense, fibrous tree roots. Studies have shown many trees have a majority of their feeder or surface roots within the top 2 to 3 inches of the soil. They will quickly fill in a raised bed area as they take up additional water, nutrients and oxygen exchange. Because of this root competition, it is often difficult to plant large shrubs under mature trees. Dramatically

raising the soil level under trees can cause other problems as well, including bark decay when soil is piled against the trunk.

In addition, too much disturbance to the roots of sensitive trees may damage or kill them. To avoid problems, plant small, understory trees and shrubs in ground beds, in the open, root-free zones between trees. If you must plant within the root zone of established trees, start with small plants that do not require a large planting hole and take care not to damage the bark of mature tree roots when you dig. (MJF)

## Seasonal Needle Drop on Evergreens

Evergreens do not keep their needles indefinitely. Older, inner needles, discolor and drop off after one to five years, depending on the evergreen in question.

Sometimes the drop occurs slowly. On other occasions, many needles may turn yellow all at once in late summer or fall. Because weather triggers the condition, many evergreens are likely to show symptoms in the fall. If you are not familiar with this natural process, it could cause you a great deal of concern.

Each species of evergreens

usually keeps its needles for a definite length of time. White pines are the most dramatically affected. They usually keep three years of needles in summer and two in winter. The three-year old white pine needles turn yellow throughout the tree in the fall. The tree will appear particularly unhealthy when these yellow needles outnumber the green ones. Austrian and Scotch pine keep their needles for three years and Norway pine keep theirs for four years.

Needles on arborvitae, usually turn brown rather than

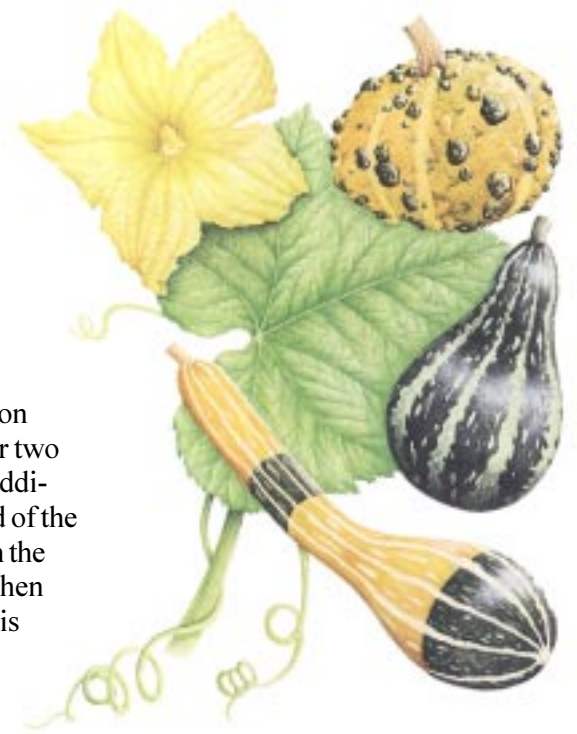
yellow when they age. They often remain attached much longer than mature pine needles. Japanese yew needles turn yellow and drop in late spring or early summer of their third year. Spruce and fir needles yellow and drop with age. These evergreens retain needles for several years, so you may not see needle drop unless you look closely on inner branches. These needle drop patterns vary from tree to tree and from year to year. (MJF)

## Drying Gourds

Harvest gourds when the vine and stem dries and begins to turn brown. Be sure to complete your harvest before the first hard frost. Immature gourds will not cure correctly, so only harvest mature fruit.

After harvest, wash the fruit in a mild bleach solution and dry off with a soft cloth. Discard any bruised, diseased or damaged fruit. To dry, place gourds on slatted trays or chicken wire fencing. Make sure they do not touch each other and are located in a warm, dry well ventilated location.

Curing can take one to six months, depending on the type of gourd. The outer skin hardens in one or two weeks, while the internal drying takes at least an additional month. Poke a small hole in the blossom end of the gourd to quicken internal drying. Occasionally turn the fruits, checking for uneven drying or soft spots. When you shake the gourd and hear the seeds rattling, it is cured and ready for a coat of paint or varnish, if desired. (MJF)



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113 Pine Needle Drop	152 Peony Care	239 Apple Harvesting
114 Mulches	153 Cannas	241 Fruit Storage
122 Fall Watering	166 Tender Bulb Care	284 Sweet Potatoes
138 Tree Stump Removal	181 Dethatching a Lawn	285 Storing Squash
143 What to do with Leaves	182 Seeding a Lawn	
	184 Aerify Your Lawn	