

## Smarter Gardening

*How to analyse your garden and adapt or tweak it to suit your lifestyle and work habits.*

October sees the start of the 'real' gardening season on the lower island, and many of the things you can do over the winter months will make your garden healthier, more water efficient and easier to manage.

### Why Garden in Fall?

- Take advantage of our Mediterranean climate
- Easiest time to build soil structure to hold moisture for next summer.
- Best time to plant and move as we have a longer mild growing season at this time of year
- Good time to reduce overwintering pests and diseases
- Best time to build compost and leaf mold
- Time to plant early growers - sweet peas, self seeding annuals and bulbs.

### Four Main Rules of Fall Gardening in Victoria

- 1.) **Don't spread spore borne diseases** (mildew, blackspot, rust) - Avoid working on diseased plants in damp conditions. Don't prune peaches or plums in cool moist weather
- 2.) **Know Your Microclimate!** Microclimates are accentuated in the shoulder seasons. Use them to advantage for early spring bulbs and protected plantings. **Note wind directions** They often reverse in Fall and Winter in Victoria
- 3.) **Don't prune heavily.**, leave most pruning until after the last spring frosts mid - late February.
  - Heavy pruning stimulates growth This may be too soft to survive harsh winter weather.
  - Frost occurs late, usually after growth has begun in January Leave most pruning until after the last spring frosts in mid – late February
- 4.) **Don't destroy the structure of your soil** - be careful when you work clay - . Don't work clay soils which can be rolled into 'worms'. Stay out of your garden beds. Work from the edges in. Leave new beds 'rough' Set them under mulch in fall to break down.

**Fall is the Time for Analysis** What Does Your Design Need? What do you need to reduce your work and increase your enjoyment

Assess Your Design for Your Work Levels

Take a photo and circle your main issues. Be ruthless! Save yourself work - Don't overplant

- Leave 5 – 10 year development spacing minimum between plantings
- Space hedging the correct distance apart
- Watch setbacks from roads, sidewalks and paths.
- Work on the worst problem areas of your garden first
- Look for areas which needed infill plantings between seasons to prevent weed growth. In many cases you can plan now to reduce the work needed to transition between seasons.
- Plan cover crops to keep the soil protected from weeds through all seasons. - nepeta to cover tulip bulbs - geraniums to cover dying bulbs in pots. Mulch to prevent compacted soils.

## What Maintenance Issues Do You Have?

What is your most difficult chore? Watering, weeding, disease control, pruning?  
How can you reduce the work you need to do regularly?  
Simplify for greater impact, less work,  
Pay attention to focal points to give your garden more impact at first glance

### Better Water Control

Bury weeping hoses - felted styles work best  
Encourage deep rooted plantings - make sure you water effectively and less often  
Plan for mixed planting with complementary root systems

### What type of weeds do you have? Why are they there?

*Buttercups* are signs of acidic soil and poor drainage.  
*Mushroom rings* may indicate dead or decaying wood below the soil surface  
*Dandelions* are signs of compacted soils  
*Chickweed* indicates a healthy soil, with moisture.

### Three main rules of weeds

- Most grow on compacted or wet soils
- Control the source of weed seeds - plant "weedbreaks" if necessary
- Open soil at germination season prevents weed germination- keep soils 'fluffy', keep ground covered with mulches, especially during peak weed seeding and germination seasons

### What does your soil need for winter?

- Organic matter and mulches – as much as possible – provide depth and shelter for worms in summer. Dig organic material into the root zone as you plant.
- Large soil clumps will break down with winter weather so dig new areas and leave them to 'soften'
- Add coarser particles of lime where needed over winter for slow breakdown.

### Simple tweaks for lower maintenance

- Spend as much time improving and taking care of your soil as you do planting. Avoid standing in your garden beds.
- Use mulches, not landscape fabric - better control of moisture and soil flora and fauna. Use fine mulches or mulches which break down easily - ground leaves, straw, coffee grounds, compost
- Use the right tools sized to suit you. Prep your tools if you haven't done it since spring. Sharpen pruners, dividing knives and spades.

## Gardening Tools.

Size tools to fit the worker.

Manage waste removal in growing gardens by using a tarp instead of a wheelbarrow. This means less lifting, less soil compaction

**Sharp spade** – sharp enough the edge will cut paper

**Hoe** – Swoes or push pull hoes are most effective

**Tarp** with handles to drag – avoids bending to lift weeds, avoids compacting garden or lawn,

**Small garden rake** - to get around existing plants

**Curved pruning saw** – the curve makes it more manoeuvrable

**Sharp pruning shears** - buy these according to your hand size and grip strength.

**Dividing knife** – one with a curved serrated blade is preferable

**Trowel** - I prefer the ones with a serrated edge for planting

## Things To Do In Fall

- Clean up to control pests and diseases
- Resize and replant shrubs and perennials, plant bulbs
- Plant new lawns (once moisture returns)
- Improve soil
- Protect tender plants

## Disease and Pest Control

- Check plants and clean up before the wet season to avoid spreading splash back spores
- Remove all leaves with spore borne diseases.
- Remove alternate hosts of diseases like rust (mallows, hollyhocks, snapdragons....)
- Remove traces of heavy mildew from stucco backing walls. Want spores washed away, and plants mulched before fall rains arrive.

## Deer

- Redesign problem areas to reduce ease of access through winter and early spring when browse is scarce.
- Anchor plastic netting to the ground with tent pegs where they enter to interfere with their footing.
- Set trellis against openings they jump through. Leave plants unpruned so growth is harder.

## Ticks

- Reduce long grass areas and areas which remain moist through the summer, especially if you have a deer problem.
- Remove leaf litter
- Keep areas around bird feeders clean

## Fall Planting Chores

- Divide and replant perennials if necessary
- Move shrubs and small trees Trench around to cut side roots, then cut root ball free after a month or two with the trench so side roots can re-establish in the root ball.
- Plant bulbs Choose the earliest sun spots and earliest varieties
- Plant strawberry sets on hills to avoid winter monsoons
- Plant winter vegetables
- Plant sweet peas to move into trenches in October

## Plant bulbs

- If you sow in grass will the bulbs be finished before the grass becomes a problem cutting height?
- Plant bulbs so they act as fillers to prevent early weeds Great candidates for under low deciduous shrubs and roses are bulbs like species crocus or *Allium christophii*. These self seeders will begin growth early in spring, outcompeting weeds and flowering and dying before the shrubs leaf out fully.
- For less work avoid tulips or plant two colors. Alternate flower colors from year to year by cutting one color of flowers off as they show color so each has a rest year from flowering.

## Tricks for Bulb Containers

- Can the containers be stored for next year? Use plastic inside show pots
- Can they be overplanted with extra containers or infilling perennials To cover the bulb stems while they dry?

## Plant, Repair, or Remove Lawns

Deal with the reason for weeds

- Shade
- Traffic
- Overuse for grass variety
- Pets - and grub eating varmints
- Water issues = usually too much at the wrong time

Raise cutting height for mowing,

Level sunken areas apply up to 1 inch (2.5cm) of soil , ¼ inch (.5cm) at a time.

Add lawn seed over entire area to renovate if necessary

Plant “weed breaks” if necessary to block weeds blowing in from areas you can’t control.

## Preparation pruning for winter

- Finish any summer pruning of fruit or flowering plants like lavender, by the first days of September, better done in early August.
- Remove peach branches which fruited this year . Leave them only if you need to change the structure of the plant. Peaches fruit on new wood. Do not prune peaches or plums in cool, moist weather!
- Only lightly prune roses, hydrangeas and other shrubs in fall, removing only dead branches or branches which will cross and rub in storms. Know which direction your winds blow in winter!
- Remove suckers by gently working away the soil from the roots and pulling away the sucker, don’t cut them off!
- Main pruning occurs after the last frosts in February. Wait to prune deciduous trees and shrubs until after dormancy.

## Protect Tender Plants

- *Protect* - tender plants (peony crowns, artichokes, bananas.... with a mulch of straw or dry leaves, or build shelters from greenhouse coroplast
- *Overwinter* - geraniums and dahlias, which should be stored in a cool, humid, indirectly lit space (a garage, under a porch) in paper bags, not plastic. Soil is not necessary if you remove them from the ground and store them just before the first frosts. Some dahlia tubers will overwinter if planted deeply enough in well drained soils.
- *Take cuttings* – keep a ‘mother ‘plant or two for geranium cuttings in early spring. Take fall cuttings of flowering shrubs and roses which root well in damp sand in cool weather in indirect (north) light.