



October, November, December 2016

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This summer we all recognized Mother Nature's insistence on doing things her own way in her own time! By anybody's standards, this was a difficult summer ... hard on gardens and even harder on the gardeners who tend them! The late cool start, followed by prolonged heat, serious humidity and assorted bugs and insects in large numbers, has left us all frustrated and confused. Gardeners dragged hoses around, worried about wells, checked weather reports daily and scanned the skies, waiting for rains that refused to come when needed.

New England gardeners learn to go with the flow. We all know who's really in charge! Now, hopefully, without the heat and humidity, planting, dividing and general maintenance in the garden will become a pleasure. Our ground stays warm until almost Thanksgiving and the temperature cool-down is gradual. Sunny days and cooler nights keep the dew on the grass well into the morning. Indian Summer traditionally only occurs when warm days come after a killing frost ... and that occurs anywhere from mid-October to mid-November. It's Mother Nature's last gift to us before we bed down for the winter.

As the gardening days begin to wind down, there is something very comforting about repeating the annual ritual of putting the garden to bed. It takes place over many weeks without the urgency and pace of spring gardening and allows us the time to savor these last golden days and to take our time over the chores.

It's also a good time to reflect on the garden year now ending. What went well, what didn't? What new plants would you like to try? What plants no longer fit in? Are some of your flowering bushes over-grown? Does your basic garden plan still work for your current life? Nature never sits still and our gardens change too. Fall is the perfect time to adapt the garden to a new design that better suits the way you choose to garden now.

Leaving your garden neat and tidy will pay huge dividends in the spring and give you a jump start on the next season. Many perennials really go dormant on their own schedule and this fall is predicted to be warmer than usual. Your main role is to tidy up, cutting things back in late October and November. Do not cut back plants too early as it could produce a sudden spurt of new growth. Wait until the plant's leaves are yellow or brown and, as long as no disease is present, remove everything to the compost pile, layering in some fallen leaves.

A general guide, **Putting Your Garden to Bed for the Winter**, is available on the web site and at the nursery.

Upcoming Workshops

As the holidays approach, Acer Gardens is planning several fee-based Workshops. Email announcements will be sent out 2 weeks before each Workshop so that you will have time to sign-up in advance and reserve your place. Last year's Workshops were filled with holiday spirit, good cheer and home-made cookies so don't miss this year's fun!

The holiday Workshops will start right after Thanksgiving and will showcase both Winter Arrangements and Decorating Wreaths. Multiple sessions will be scheduled. Learn how to bring the beauty of the season into your home and add your own touches to this festive holiday time.

The Plant of the Month

The plant of the Month is available at the nursery checkout table from the first of each month on. These plants are carefully chosen to showcase current bloom and are featured at the nursery from April through October.

October : **Heuchera** (Coral Bells)

Zone: 4-9 Height: 8-12" Spread: 1-2'

This plant deserves a place in every partial-shade woodland or rock garden. Planted in mass, they are the ideal border edger or ground cover, but also make great accent container plants. Eye-catching foliage ranges in color from bronze-green to maroon and purple. The mounding plants produce small, cheerful flowers in cream to coral. Some, with dead-heading, bloom the entire season. Heuchera combines well with other shade-loving plants such as Astilbe, Ferns, Hakonechloa, Lysimachia and ornamental grasses.

The Really-Must-Do-Now List

Don't fertilize or prune roses now --- wait until spring. Tie back any long climbing rose canes to prevent wind whip. Hill up soil and mulch around the base of Hybrid Teas before the ground freezes. Rugosas are very hardy and need no attention other than trimming back exceptionally long canes which might be damaged during the winter.

Do your transplanting and moving now in order to give plant material time to settle in. Hosta, Daylilies, Black-Eyed Susan and Bearded Iris can all be divided now. Keep the new transplants well watered throughout the rest of the growing season and make sure your transplants are mulched going into the winter.

Let ornamental Grasses stay in place. They suit our winter landscape and also act as a bird refuge. Cut the Grasses down to about 18" in early spring.

New trees and bushes can be planted in the fall but established trees and shrubs should only be transplanted in the spring.

Remember to deep water all new plantings at least once a week.

If you are mulching new plantings, use Double Ground hard and soft bark mulch. It carries no diseases or insects and breaks down nicely, adding organic material to the soil over time. Always available in bulk at the

nursery, the mulch should be applied 1-2" deep and kept a few inches away from the stems or trunks of your plant material.

Start to apply deer repellents now. Creatures of habit, deer quickly get used to certain scents and are lazy about changing established routes so it's a good idea to change repellents often.

Seasonal Reminders

Keep weeding and dead-heading. Many Connecticut weeds routinely live through the winter!

Early October is your last chance to take cuttings from Coleus and Begonias, root them in water and plant them up. They make quick, easy house plants and will give you indoor color all winter long. Do not be surprised if your red Coleus becomes variegated during the course of the winter ... when planted out in the spring, it will quickly revert to its original color. Your rooted and potted Coleus plants can be planted outside at the same time you plant your annuals!

The bees will continue to pollinate late-blooming perennials: Anemones, Asters, Roses and Sedums are particular favorites.

Let grass clippings stay on the lawn to decompose. Around the second or third week in November, apply fertilizer and lime to the lawn. Now is the time to also put down grub control.

Don't prune your Rhododendrons now ... they set next year's flowers right after they bloom in the spring and you could lose next year's blossom.

Don't cut back these plants/bushes until spring:

Ajuga	Caryopteris	Lavender
Artemisia	Dianthus	Lirope
Bergenia	Euphorbia	Montauk Daisies
Buddleia	Gaura	Perovskia
Campanula	Hellebore	Stachys
Carex	Heuchera	Tiarella

Edge the perennial beds so that the garden has a neat appearance going into the winter.

Remember to store Wilt-Stop, insecticides, fungicides and other "goeey" products in the laundry room or a frost-free cellar. Granular fertilizer and seeds can be safely stored in the garage.

Fall Planting

Fall planting is a great time to get a jump on the next season and to plan for fuller and longer bloom periods in the garden ... it is the perfect time to plant or transplant many perennials, shrubs and trees. The combination of warm soil and reasonably dependent rain leads to good root growth and will give your new plantings a strong head start. In fact, fall planted perennials develop larger, better-established root systems and start to make quicker growth in the spring. Plants with the head start of fall planting appear to adapt better to summer heat.

Fall is also the ideal time to amend your garden soil. The first step is to have your soil tested. Go to www.soiltest.uconn.edu for complete instructions on the process. You will receive a report which will include both analysis and recommendations for improving your soil. Some gardeners test soil from different parts of the garden and act accordingly. The ideal garden soil texture is a sandy loam which allows for air and water movement. Adding organic matter to soil ... nitrogen, phosphorus and/or potassium ... encourages beneficial microbial activity and provides a nutritional benefit. Some proven types of organic matter include compost, peat moss and grass clippings. How well your soil incorporates the organic matter will determine what supplemental feeding will be necessary to keep your plants happy next season.

As you look at your perennial beds now, you can identify current “gaps” and add something to extend the season. The nursery has many fall-blooming perennials available, such as Japanese Anemones, Sedum, Boltonia, Agastache, Cimicifuga, Dendranthema, Asters, Eupatorium, Lirope, Kirengeshoma and ornamental Grasses. Alchemilla mollis, Black-eyed Susan and Coreopsis can all be planted at this time of year. The fall is also a good time to consider adding a few native plants. Many natives have an “open” look to their growth habit which blends particularly well with perennials currently in bloom and their sun/shade requirements are very adaptable. Think about adding New England Aster, purple Coneflower, Cardinal Flower, Bee Balm, Tradescantia, Persicaria or Spiranthes. Now is the ideal time to plant Buddleias as the butterflies are still swooping around looking for nectar.

All early-spring blooming perennials can be planted in the fall including Phlox subulata (Creeping Phlox), Iberis (Candytuft), Hellebore (Lenten Rose), Primulas and Pulmonaria.

Berries in a fall garden bring their own burst of color. Adding color you can see from the house is a good way to connect the indoors to the outdoors all season long. Consider planting purple Beauty Bush, Snowberry, Winterberry and Hollies.

Asters

Available in an incredible range of color and plant size, Asters bring zest to a fall garden. Their long period of bloom (late summer through fall) and wide height range makes them invaluable in a mixed bed. Mingling well with other fall perennials, Asters establish themselves easily, thrive in average soil and will take sun to partial shade. Some bloom in clouds of pale flowers; others flaunt deep shades of purple. All combine well with native plants. (Cutting the plants back in early June will prevent “Aster sprawl”.) Divide every 3-5 years to keep the plants under control and remove unwanted seedlings as you spot them.

Trees for Winter Interest and Color

New England winters can be long and gray. Winter reveals a garden’s bones but the subdued palette can be countered and livened up by introducing trees with bark interest, interesting shapes and color. Newly planted trees should be well-watered as the season progresses.

Some choices, well adapted to this area and garden zone, include:

Stewartia pseudocamellia (Japanese Stewartia)

25’

Sun to shade

Rich, well-drained soil

This slow grower produces white flowers in June and July with very showy red-orange fall foliage. Its peeling bark provides winter interest in tones of orange, green and gray. It needs some shelter from strong afternoon sun.

Acer griseum (Paperbark maple)

30' Sun/partial shade Well-drained soil

This slow-growing, highly ornamental tree shows very red foliage well into the fall season. Exfoliating cinnamon bark peels provide winter interest.

Betula nigra (River Birch)

40' Loves sun Tolerates wet, acidic soil

This fast growing tree should be placed where it can be seen from the house. The colored paper-thin bark turns orange, cinnamon, and lavender-grey and the peeling bark provides color interest all winter long. Easy to establish, this tree withstands wind, snow and ice.

Cornus kousa (Japanese dogwood)

20' Partial shade to sun Adaptable

A carefree, vase-shaped flowering tree, the Kousa's white flowers bloom in May and June and are followed by red berries in late summer and fall foliage in purple and scarlet. Eye-catching bark and a small frame make it ideal near foundation plantings and tight areas. This tree provides a safe haven for birds in the winter.

Malus (Crabapple)

15'-25' Full sun Rich loam

Blooming in May, the crabapple produces fruit in summer and fall foliage across a wide range of colors from purple to red to yellow. Autumn transforms both the foliage and fruit to deeper colors. Winter snow accents bark and branches and the shape of the tree.

Sciadopitys verticillata (Umbrella Pine)

25' Full sun Well-drained, rich soil

This evergreen specimen tree is exceptionally slow-growing. Its long needles accentuate its pyramidal shape and its dense foliage stands out against snow.

Helping Evergreens Get Ready for Winter

Evergreens need to be well-watered before the start of winter but they should not be fertilized. Do not cut back your evergreens in the fall. If an evergreen has really exceeded its limits, take a few cuttings for Christmas decorations. A late November application of an anti-transparent (such as Wilt-Stop) will help to

protect your evergreens from winter desiccation and can also be sprayed on Hydrangeas and Japanese Maples. For best results, re-apply after a warm winter period in mid-February.

Fall is perfect evergreen planting time. Evergreens can add a strong vertical accent and focal point to the landscape and give you “green” to look at during our long, gray winters. Consider adding Firs (Abies), Spruce (Picea), Pines (Pinus) or Cypress (Chamaecyparis.)

Changing to Fall Containers

Mums are not the only seasonal choice for replanting tired-looking containers. If the container is completely winter proof, perennial Grasses can be planted and will provide a refuge for birds as well as decorating the landscape. Adding gourds will give a Thanksgiving touch. Heucheras, Euphorbias and Ivy can be combined for a new look. Cabbages will provide a foliage splash with their beautiful leaves and Pansies will add a cheerful note. Window boxes can be re-planted to brighten the winter landscape. Use small cultivars of Boxwood, Cypress or Euphorbia to establish a fresh look and tuck in a few Pansies. Pansies are remarkably resilient and may surprise you by reappearing early in spring! Some of the newer dwarf-shrubs can be placed into containers for the winter and then transplanted to the garden in the spring. Be sure your container can withstand frost and dropping temperatures. If a light frost threatens, extend bloom time by bringing your containers and hanging baskets into the garage overnight. Put them back outside and continue to enjoy their color.

Container plantings for fall rely heavily on using the colors of fall foliage as a way to extend the season. Come to the nursery and see how many choices are waiting on the benches! Once your containers are planted, stop applying liquid fertilizer which might encourage too much new growth. Keep watering the containers until the soil freezes.

Containers can also make the switch to winter very easily. Think about adding small evergreens which can be transplanted into the garden in the spring. Back them with colored stems for a little punch. Use branches with berries and add cut evergreens and cones as the holidays approach. Place the winter containers where they can be seen from the house as a way to connect the outside landscape to the inside.

Storing Tender Bulbs and Tubers

Some tender bulbs, corns, rhizomes and tubers must be dug up and overwintered where they are safe from freezing temperatures. Don't store in air tight containers and be sure to label by type and color. If mice routinely get into your cellar, ask your supermarket produce manager for an empty fine-meshed red onion bag. Line the bag with several layers of newspaper, add the cedar chips and layer the bulbs/tubers in. Pull the bag closed, label by type and color, and hang high on a hook in the cellar.

Tuberous Begonias and **Cannas** are treated the same way: allow a frost to kill the tops but do not let the tubers freeze. Cut off the foliage, carefully lift the plants and let dry for one week. Shake off the dirt and store in peat moss, sawdust or cedar chips (pet store) in a container or box. Plant Dahlias directly in the garden when all danger of frost has passed and the soil has warmed. Cannas can be re-potted in the spring or planted in the ground once the temperatures are above 70. Keep well watered.

Caladiums should be lifted before frost and allowed to dry in a warm spot. Cut back the foliage and store at 45-50 degree, packed loosely in peat moss. Repot in the early spring, keep the soil warm and moist and move outdoors after all danger of frost.

Dahlias should be dug before a hard freeze but their tops can die back after a light frost. Cut off the foliage, shake the dirt off and store in peat moss or cedar chips. Dahlias can be planted directly into the garden once the temperatures are warm.

Gladioli should be lifted after the first frost. Cut the stems back to 1" and allow the corms to dry. Keep only the new, plump corms and store in peat moss or sand. Plant directly in the ground as it warms, staggering the plantings to extend bloom.

Colocasia (Elephant's Ears) make dependable potted house plants. Feed lightly throughout the winter and water often. They may need to be repotted in the spring before they go back outdoors. If you want to store the tubers, lift and clean and then store in peat moss in a cool, dry spot.

Acidantha should be dug up before they freeze. Clean off the soil (do not wash) and store the roots on their side in vermiculite or the cedar shavings used at the bottom of gerbil cages. They do well stored in boxes in the basement, protected from temperature extremes and dampness.

Houseplants and Light

By the middle of October at the latest, your houseplants should all be back in the house after their summer outdoors. Inspect the plants carefully before you bring them in and treat for any bugs or pests. Cut back or prune the plant if necessary and re-pot with fresh soil. Grouping plants together is an easy way to generate humidity (especially if all the plants are on a water-filled humidity tray) and to showcase diverse foliage and plant forms. Fertilize the houseplants every 2 weeks.

Rex Begonia (fabulous foliage), Ferns (try Japanese Painted Fern or Boston Fern), Coleus, English Ivy, Pilea and Peperomia are all good choices for indoor color all winter long. Most houseplants don't like the direct sun of a windowsill although Cyclamen, Gardenia, and Geraniums do prefer a south facing window. East and west facing windows are fine for most plants but you need to understand the growth habits of your plants. Leaves that are pale green or stems that are weak or too long indicate that your plants need more light. Placing your plant properly is key to growing healthy house plants and light levels are important.

Standard light definitions:

Bright light: a sunny southern or western facing window with bright, direct light all day.

Indirect light: an eastern facing window or the interior of a room that faces south or west.

Low light: rooms with north facing windows provide little direct light.

Grow lights are often helpful and some plants actually thrive when placed under ordinary house lamps. Watching your house plant's performance and monitoring its growth will tell you what it needs. As the days begin to lengthen, those needs may begin to change.

Terrariums

Terrariums have become an increasingly popular way of showing off the beauty of individual plants. They are gardens in miniature, presenting an array of foliage and shapes to the viewer. They are also less demanding than many house plants as the condensation inherent in a glass container reduces the need for constant watering. Choose dwarf, slow-growing plants (Mosses, Succulents, Ferns and Bromeliads) that will

thrive in low light and high humidity and be sure your hand will fit in the opening so that maintenance is easy. Acer Gardens has some pre-planted terrariums available ... what a great Christmas gift for a house-bound gardener ... but the nursery will be happy to work with your own container. Call ahead for an appointment and let us help you design your winter Garden-in-a-Glass!

Often-Asked Questions

I'd like to plant a holly bush so that I can see it from the house. Are they difficult to grow?

Hollies can add structure to your garden and their deep green, shiny leaves stand out in the winter landscape. Many new cultivars produce bright red berries on the female bush. Site the bush in well-drained, slightly acidic soil and be sure it gets strong sun. Prune the holly bush in early spring or summer. Remember ... holly berries are harmful to humans and pets if eaten so it's not a good idea to cut branches for the house.

Should I rake the leaves off the ground around rhododendrons and azaleas?

Many gardeners prefer not to rake leaves out of shade gardens. Fallen leaves act as a natural mulch for broad leaf evergreens such as Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Mountain Laurel and help prevent moisture loss during a dry winter. As the leaves break down they will form a good base for spring mulch.

When do I plant Hellebores and Primula?

All early-spring blooming perennials should be planted in the fall including Phlox subulata (Creeping Phlox), Iberis (Candytuft), Hellebore (Lenten Rose), Primulas and Pulmonaria.

I'd like to try growing Alliums. Do they have special requirements?

The key to growing terrific Alliums (and giving flower beds the "WOW" factor), is choosing the right location. Alliums are happiest planted in soil that stays on the dry side. If your soil does not drain quickly, add a little sand to the soil around the Alliums. Alliums should be planted at a depth 3 times the diameter of the bulb ... (a 2" bulb is planted 6" deep.) After blooming, pinch the faded head off before it can set seed but leave the foliage and stem to feed the bulb for next year's flowers.

Is fall a good time to put compost on flower beds?

Fall is the ideal time to spread compost. Weather conditions are often drier in the fall making it easier to work compost into existing flower beds. Rain and snow and the freezes and thaws of our winters will help it work down into the soil.

I've spent the summer fighting off furry things ... moles, voles, chipmunks and rabbits ... but the voles have been the worst. What do I do now?

The voles have had a very active season. Since they do not hibernate, they will continue chewing all winter long! Now is the time of year to knock the vole population down. The nursery has animal-resistant bait boxes and other alternate forms of control available. Be careful not to leave piles of sticks around or to put down winter mulch in areas which are vole-ridden; it will only provide them with cover to hide in! Some bulbs have proven to be vole-resistant including Alliums, Daffodils, Hyacinths, Hyacinthoides, Muscari and Scilla. The Acer Gardens web-site has an information sheet available: **Co-Existing with Voles!**

My daffodils looked a little sparse last spring ... where will they do best?

Well-situated daffodils will bloom and naturalize easily as long as you site them properly. They need 6 hours of direct sunlight (even after the trees have leafed out) to set next year's flowers. Give them well-draining soil and fertilize lightly with a low-nitrogen fertilizer as the first shoots emerge in the spring. After your daffodils flower, dead-head but wait until the leaves turn yellow before cutting them off and don't braid the leaves. This year's leaves are next year's flowers! Many gardeners find that inter-planting daffodils with other perennials disguises the dying foliage. Good choices for companion plantings include Daylilies, Lamiastrum, Iris, or Vinca.

The Vegetable Garden

Now is the time to plant both hardneck and softneck garlic. Pick a new area in the vegetable garden with fertile, well-drained soil. Take the garlic cloves apart and plant 4-6" apart, 4" deep. Mulch lightly with straw. The garlic will start to grow now. In the spring, you will see more growth and the bud will form scapes. Cut that stalk off ... it's delicious sautéed. After the foliage yellows and browns in midsummer you can start to harvest and dry the garlic. Store the garlic in bunches in a cool location. The nursery has 5 different kinds of garlic bulbs available ... all will do well in this climate.

Leave carrots, leeks, parsnips, radishes, beets, green peppers and turnips in the garden so that you can harvest them through the fall. When you harvest your onions, let them dry outside in the sun for a few days before cleaning them and bringing them inside for storage. When its foliage turns yellow, dig up potato plants. The potato vine can act as the host to late tomato blight so be careful to discard all parts of the potato plant. After a killing frost, pull up tomato, squash and bean plants.

Clean out the vegetable garden. Remove all old plants and fruits (roots, leaves and stems) but do not put them in the compost bin ... burn or put in garbage bags to help prevent the spread of disease and insects. Double dig the empty bed and add compost to be ready for early spring plantings. Adding decomposed leaves and/or grass clippings sprinkled with some granular organic fertilizer will add nitrogen to the soil. Cover your strawberries lightly with straw not hay (which harbors weeds). Remember to make a chart of the layout of your vegetable bed so that you can rotate the crops next spring. Re-assess your plantings to decide if you grew the right "mix" for your family's eating habits.

Think about ways to expand next year's vegetable garden by re-arranging space. More abundant harvests are possible by not planting just in rows. Peas, cucumbers and tomatoes can all be grown on stakes or trellises as long as you allow for the weight of the mature plant. Many new varieties of vegetables have been developed recently to accommodate gardeners who grow vegetables in containers on the patio. Small-sized vegetables currently available include bush cucumbers, patio tomatoes and even small zucchini.

Herbs

Many herbs can be re-potted and brought indoors to over-winter in the house. They may need misting from time to time as they react to the loss of the natural humidity in the air. The nursery will be happy to design an indoor container herb garden for you, customized to your cooking style and needs. We still have parsley, rosemary, thyme, sage, chives, cilantro and various mints available and can give you guidance on how to keep your herbs flourishing all winter long.

If you didn't use all your herbs, you can dry them easily in the microwave. Arrange sprigs of thyme, oregano, rosemary, parley or chives in a single layer on a paper towel on a large paper plate. Microwave on

High for 1 1/2 minutes or until dry and brittle. Remove the leaves from the stems. Cool them and then crumble into small, labeled Ziploc bags. They can be stored for 1 year. Do not freeze.

If you currently have an over-abundance of herbs, here's a quick way to save them for winter use:

Soften 1 stick of butter (¼ lb.), add 2 Tbs chopped herbs and mash together with a fork. Wet your hands, form the butter into a log and roll in foil. Firm the butter roll in the refrigerator and then cut it into 8 slices. Label a small Ziploc bag, insert the butter slices and freeze. Your vegetables will taste of summer's bounty all winter long. Some herb/vegetable combinations include:

Beans (green)	Oregano, basil
Carrots	Sage
Eggplant	Parsley, basil
Peas	Thyme
Spinach	Basil, dill
Squash (Butternut)	Thyme, rosemary, basil, sage
Squash (yellow/green)	Parsley, oregano, basil

The Bulbs Are Here!

This year, Acer Gardens has many different kinds of bulbs available, with a greatly expanded selection. Tulips are back in many vibrant colors as are the familiar Daffodils and Hyacinths. Bulbs are an easy way to add color and diversity to existing beds and will provide welcome color after a long winter! It's a good idea to plant a few unexpected/unusual bulbs in areas you can see from the house. Try tucking them in under low, spreading evergreens so that they will poke through the branches. Adding small bulbs to your established gardens is a quick way to enhance your spring plantings and a fun way to experiment with "new looks".

Photograph your garden before you plant your bulbs and mark the photographs so that you know where the new bulbs have been situated. Many gardeners keep a special "bulb" photo album to help them remember plantings.

Don't be afraid to mix-and-match your bulbs and to plant in drifts. Careful planning can give you bulb bloom from March to May. Naturalizing gives an informal look and is a particularly useful technique for bulbs that multiply easily. Once flowers fade, the foliage keeps growing so choose a site that doesn't need early spring mowing. Bulbs want well-drained soil. Avoid planting bulbs in areas that remain wet for a long time as they may rot. Oddly enough, some smaller bulbs simply don't have a true "pointy side up" so just lay the bulb on its side when you plant it; it will generally right itself and grow toward the sun.

Before planting, store your bulbs in a cool, dry place with low humidity away from heat and strong sunlight. Wait to plant until the ground has cooled down to around 55 F so that they don't grow unnecessary top growth and waste their energies. Late October to mid-November is optimum planting time for this area although Lilies should not be planted until well into November. As you plant your bulbs, add Bulb Tone fertilizer before back-filling the dirt. When the bulbs have bloomed in the spring and the foliage has died back, top dress the bulbs again with Bulb Tone.

Forcing Bulbs

Forcing and growing bulbs indoors gives us a way to have flowers blooming even with snow on the ground and makes a great family winter project. "Forcing" is simply a way of making a bulb produce leaves and flowers ahead of its natural outdoor schedule. You speed up the process by manipulating time and temperature.

Almost any container can be used for forcing bulbs but you will need a run-off saucer under the container if it has drainage holes. Fill the container 2/3 full of soil and moisten. Place the bulbs (close together but not touching) and gently press down. Add soil to the top of the container, water, and put in a cool, dark place like a refrigerator or unheated garage/cellar. Chilling for at least 6-8 weeks will imitate dormancy. Flowering will take about 12 weeks for snowdrops, crocus and daffodils and about 16 weeks for tulips. When you see shoots about 3" above the soil line, bring the bulbs into a cool location. When the foliage and buds are well developed, move the pots to a bright, sunny window.

Forcing paper-whites is particularly easy because the bulbs do not require a chilling period and need only 5-6 weeks from planting to bloom. You'll have Christmas flowers if you start your paper-whites by November 10. Plant at 2-week intervals and enjoy blooms from Christmas to Easter.

Paper-whites grow best using the stones and water method: take a waterproof bowl and fill it 2/3 full of gravel or small, decorative stones, usually white. Insert the base of the bulbs so that they sit firmly and add more stones but do not cover them. Pour in water up to the base of the bulbs, replenishing as needed, and store in a cool, dark place (usually 2-3 weeks) until first growth appears. Some people add 1 Tb. of vodka or plain gin to the paper-white water after the bulbs come out of their storage period. This helps keep the stems short and prevents toppling but will not interfere with bloom. Do not fertilize the bulbs.

Forcing is very hard on most bulbs and they will not bloom again. Tulips and paper-whites should just be thrown out. Amaryllis will re-bloom successfully (see above directions.)

Acer Gardens' information sheet on **Forcing Bulbs** is available on the web site and at the nursery.

Holiday Flowers, Wreaths and Containers

Wreaths, containers, bows and mixed greens will be available at the nursery starting the week before Thanksgiving. We take individual orders and can help you design a tablescape to fit your holiday décor. If you have favorite holiday table containers bring them to the nursery and let staff help you fill them to make this holiday season really special! Gift certificates are available at the nursery as well as pre-planted Paper-whites in containers and many Amaryllis bulbs.

Poinsettias and Amaryllis

Poinsettia

Some Poinsettias can remain in bloom for 2-6 months! They prefer a day temperature of 67 degrees, hate drafts and like a humid environment and the bright, indirect light of an east window. Acer Gardens will have 15 different varieties of Poinsettias available to choose from including many of the new pink and hot pink dwarfs. The Poinsettias will be ready for sale just before Thanksgiving.

Amaryllis

Acer has a remarkable group of Amaryllis bulbs available this year, including a wide selection of unusual shapes and color combinations in # 1 size for you to plant in your own containers. We also have gift boxes of paper-whites and Amaryllis bulbs. Some Amaryllis bulbs have been pre-started for you to take home and continue growing. Allow 8-12 weeks from potting to bloom and start them at 10 day intervals so that you will have flowers all winter long. Plant one bulb, firmly, to a pot (the bulbs actually like a snug fit) and place in indirect sunlight at room temperature. (Be sure to place a saucer under the pot.) Water after potting and then only when the soil is dry to the touch. Do not mist.

As the flowers fade, cut off the entire stalk. You may get lucky and get another bloom! Amaryllis should spend the summer outdoors in the sun. Around Labor Day, stop watering, cut off the leaves and store the bulbs in their pots in the cellar, away from any sun. Do not water them until you are ready to start the forcing cycle again.

Last Chores

Clean out the bird feeders and prepare them for the coming season. Store bird seed in metal garbage cans with tight-fitting lids to discourage access by mice and chipmunks.

Empty containers, clean and place in the garage. Some alpine troughs (Hypertufa) can be left out if placed near the house but stone planters are not winter-proof and should be stored in the garage.

Clean out the wheelbarrow and discard any damaged garden gloves/tools. Clean and sharpen garden tools. Leave everything tidy on the garden shelves. Some gardeners claim an open jar (or small Ziploc bag) of dried mint leaves left near the house entrance from the garage helps to discourage mice from entering.

Drain and store hoses. Turn off all outside water faucets. Local hardware stores carry snap-on covers for outdoor faucets which offer additional protection.

Winters can be long in New England. Look ahead and think about planning a day trip to the CT Flower Show in Hartford. The 36th annual CT Garden Show will take place from Thursday, February 23 through Sunday, February 26, 2017 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. with a theme of "Woodland Enchantment". There will be more than 300 booths, landscaped gardens and over 80 hours of seminars and demonstrations (which are free with your ticket.) Go to www.ctflowershow.com for further information, ticket availability and seminar listings. What a great way to get ready for spring!

General Reminder

Acer Gardens will close on 12/24 and, weather permitting, will re-open the last weekend of March 2017. Please check the web site for the exact date.

Acer Gardens
Linda Z. Lynch
Editor

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