

Autumn Home & Garden



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Tips to tend a garden in early autumn

Late summer is a great time to focus on certain tasks.

As summer winds down, long stretches of sunlight are dwindling and cooler temperatures are on the horizon. Gardening enthusiasts may wonder how they can manage their backyard gardens as the peak growing season comes to a close. People may not be eager to do much in their gardens come August, particularly because the air may be hot and the dew point high. And spending the final days of summer at the beach or in the pool may take priority. However, late summer is a great time to focus on certain tasks.

Deadheading

Many plants look better with the wilted flowers removed. Furthermore, some plants, such as with lilies and roses, will benefit from having spent blooms removed so that no unnecessary energy is drawn away from the roots or bulbs. Research your plants and learn which can benefit from some late-summer deadheading to keep them thriving.



Weeding

Weeds can become problematic if they're allowed to grow unabated. Routinely go into the garden and cull the weeds.

Keep an eye open for pests

According to Garden Smart, caterpillars and beetles may be chewing on garden plants by late summer, and aphids still may be problematic. Handpick insects off of

vegetables and ornamental flowers, or use safe sprays for treating these issues.

Plant cool weather vegetables

Many plants will grow well when planted in late summer, according to Homesteading Family. Some such plants include turnips, beets, carrots, kale, chard, mustard greens, and peas. You can begin turning your summer garden, or a portion of



it, into a fall and winter garden.

Consider succession planting

Growing vegetables like beans or peas may be more successful if you try succession planting. This involves sowing new seeds every seven to 10 days to extend the harvest.

Harvesting what's ready

Pick vegetables that are ready to eat, and remove any plants that have reached the end of their growing cycle.

Convert planter boxes and containers

This is a good time to start changing over summer annuals in containers and planter boxes to those that do well in fall, such as mums, asters, pansies, and goldenrod.

There's plenty of work to be done in the garden come the end of summer.

The value of mulched leaves

Homeowners who don't look forward to dusting off their rakes each fall might be happy to learn that mulching fallen leaves with a mower may be a healthier and less labor intensive way to confront a yard covered in leaves. For 20 years, turfgrass specialists at Michigan State University studied how lawns reacted to having ground up leaves left on the lawn and the results were overwhelmingly positive. Researchers found that tiny pieces of mulched leaves eventually sifted down through the turf and provided the lawn with essential nutrients. Mulched leaves also served to control future weed growth by covering up bare spots between turf plants. Such spots typically provided openings for weed seeds to germinate and ultimately infect lawns. In fact, researchers found that mulching leaves for just three years could produce a nearly 100 percent decrease in dandelion and crabgrass growth. Homeowners with mulching mowers that also have bags can even help their gardens by alternating using the mower with and without the bag on once leaves begin to fall. When mowing with the bag on, mulched leaves can then be used as mulch in landscape beds and vegetable gardens.





What's the buzz about pollinators?



Check out these facts about pollinators and pollination to learn why they're important to ecological health.

Many people live busy lives, but when they stop to smell the roses they might see a pollinator balanced on the petals. It's easy to think of pollen only in terms of what it does to those suffering from seasonal allergies, but pollen is essential for plant and animal life.

The Ecological Society of America says pollen is a plant's male sex cells that must be transferred from one flower to the stigma of the same flower or another for the plant to produce fruit and seed. Although some of this pollination occurs naturally, such as that aided by the wind or among plants that are self-pollinating, the vast majority of plants cannot move pollen without helpers, or pollinators. Check out these facts about pollinators and pollination to learn why they're important to ecological health.

Insects are the primary pollinators, although birds, bats and other creatures also can spread pollen



around. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation credit honeybees, bumblebees, butterflies, moths, wasps, flies, and beetles with pollinating the most plants. However, the ESA says between 200,000 and 300,000 invertebrate species are estimated to serve globally as pollinators.

- Bees and other pollinators play critical roles in food production. The United States Department of Agriculture says more than 100 U.S.-grown crops rely on pollinators.
- About 75 percent of all flowering plants rely on animal pollinators.
- Pollinator.org says blueberries, chocolate, coffee, vanilla, almonds, pumpkins, and peaches are just

some of the foods and beverages that are produced with the help of pollinators.

- Most bee species native to North America are "solitary bees." They don't live in colonies and rarely sting unless physically threatened or injured. Bees largely can be left alone to do their thing and people can cohabitate comfortably nearby.
- Honeybees have different jobs than other species. A honeybee colony is made up of one reproductive queen, sexually undeveloped female workers and male drones. Drones mate with the queen so she can lay eggs, and the workers are responsible for caring for eggs, cleaning the hive and collecting nectar, pollen and other resources

for the colony.

Pollinators have been on the decline for a number of reasons. The Pollinator Partnership says threats to pollinators include pollution, pests, pathogens, changes in land use that degrades their habitats, and climate change. Honeybees, monarch butterflies and native bumblebees have all exhibited declines in recent years, according to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

People can help protect pollinators by creating pollinator-friendly garden habitats with native plants best suited to local areas. Individuals also can select old fashioned varieties of flowers whenever possible, since breeding has caused some modern blooms to lose the nectar/pollen needed to feed pollinators. Also, install houses for bats and native bees to encourage them to take up residence, and avoid the use of pesticides around the landscape.

Pollinators are vital to the health of the ecosystem. Without pollinators, food supplies would dwindle and the planet's plant life would suffer.

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Tips for winterizing exterior living areas

Many homeowners take steps to winterize their outdoor spaces and protect their belongings.

When the summer entertaining season draws to a close, homeowners need to ensure their outdoor living areas can handle weather that's right around the corner. Although outdoor furniture and other items tend to be durable, the impact snow, wind and ice can have on them may lead to damage over time. That is why many homeowners take steps to winterize their outdoor spaces and protect their belongings. Here's a look at how to prepare for the winter to come.

- **Furniture:** Cover or store furniture to protect it from the elements. Covering it with weather-proof covers can be adequate if storing items indoors is not possible.
- **Deep clean:** Items that will be covered or stored should be thoroughly cleaned prior to being removed from spaces for the season. Lingering dirt and moisture can cause damage.
- **Insulate and drain:** Don't risk damage to pipes, which can freeze and crack in the cold. Shut off the water supply to exterior faucets and drain water lines to prevent pipes from freezing and bursting. Use foam pipe insulation to prevent freezing and cover any exposed pipes.

• **Apply mulch:** After cleaning up garden debris, think about applying mulch to garden beds and cover tender plants to protect them from the weather.

• **Check gutters:** Be sure that gutters and downspouts are clear of leaves and any additional debris. If gutters and downspouts are not cleaned, ice dams may form on the roof and cause water damage.

• **Inspect and repair:** Inspect walkways and driveways for any damage and make repairs now so water will not seep in and cause further issues with freeze-thaw cycles. Consider applying a sealant to protect surfaces from snow and ice.

• **Pools and spas:** It's essential to follow the industry or manufacturer recommendations for closing down swimming pools and spas for the season. While covers may not be essential in all climates, covering can help prevent leaves and other debris from getting in the water. Water should be expelled from pipes and tubing to prevent freezing and bursting. If space allows, consider moving the pool pump indoors to prolong its longevity. Turn off the electricity to the outlet where the filter is plugged in.

There may be additional, region-specific steps to winterize a property, but these pointers are a good starting point to protect outdoor spaces.

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Perennials to consider for your garden this year

Gardeners who want to capitalize on the hardiness of perennials can consider these plants for their gardens for the next season.

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that provides a great reason to get outdoors. Getting one's hands dirty in the garden often pays off with a colorful, awe-inspiring and aesthetically appealing finished product.

Perennials are plants that live multiple years. Even though perennials may die back above ground each winter, their roots remain alive, which is why the colorful blooms typically return anew once warm weather makes a comeback. Gardeners who want to capitalize on the hardiness of perennials can consider these plants for their gardens this season.

- **Coreopsis:** Coreopsis are perennials that thrive in a wide range of conditions, including various types of soil. So gardeners who find their soil is predominantly clay as well as those with sandy soil may be able to successfully plant coreopsis on their properties. Better Homes &

Gardens notes coreopsis are native to the United States and produce colorful blooms that can withstand hot and dry weather throughout the summer.

- **Russian sage:** Russian sage produce purplish-blue flowers that BHG notes retain their color for weeks. Russian sage can be planted in a variety of the hardiness zones defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and many gardening experts recommend them to gardeners whose local climates tend to be especially hot and dry.

- **Hellebore:** BHG notes hellebore are ideal for gardeners who want some color in the early days of spring. Hellebore, sometimes referred to as "Lenten Roses," have an early flowering season, so their blooms, which can be pink, white, purple, yellow, green, rose, or purple, can be a welcome sign in spring.

- **Baptisia:** Gardening experts note these purple-blooming perennials thrive in sun. Gardeners who want perennials with particularly long life expectancies can consider baptisia, as experts note they can live for many decades. Baptisia are drought-tolerant, and they can grow



in soil that may not be considered great for other plants.

- **Coneflower.** The unique look of coneflowers has generated many enthusiasts of these perennials that bloom from early summer to fall. Coneflowers are highly adaptable, making them capable of growing in various zones and soil types. Once established, coneflowers are considered very drought-tolerant.

Perennials can add aesthetic appeal to landscapes year after year.

Gardeners are urged to speak to experts at local gardening centers to identify the perfect plants for their gardens.

Did You Know?

The best time to plant perennials is generally in the fall or early spring. Fall planting allows the roots to establish before winter, while spring planting gives them a head start on the growing season. However, the ideal time can vary based on the specific perennial and your local climate.

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How to recognize when you can stop mowing

Homeowners can keep an eye on these conditions to determine when the time is right to put their mowers away for the winter. These tips can help local wildlife when the temperatures dip.

Each weekend in spring, summer and fall, millions of homeowners fire up their mowers and cut the grass in their yards. A few hours spent mowing the lawn can be a great time to get some sun and some exercise in the great outdoors.

As fall gradually transitions to winter, homeowners may wonder when to stop mowing their lawns. Each lawn is different, and when to stop mowing may depend on a host of factors, including local climate and the type of turf. In addition to climate and turf, homeowners can keep an eye on these conditions to determine when the time is right to put their mowers away for the winter.

• **Frost:** Warm-season grasses typically go dormant after a couple of significant frosts. Homeowners can jot down each frost during fall. Frosts are most noticeable in the

early morning hours, so be sure to check lawn conditions each morning as the weather begins to grow cold. Frost may be noticeable without even going outside, but homeowners may need to go outside to check on chilly mornings or on days when the previous night was especially cold. If you must go outside, stay off the grass to protect it. Two or three frosts might be enough to make warm-season grasses go dormant for the winter. Cool-season grasses may keep growing and require moving even after a few frosts, so it's imperative that homeowners determine which type of grass is in their yards.

• **Soil temperature:** If it's hard to determine if frosts have occurred, homeowners can try checking the temperature of their soil to decide if they need to keep mowing. The lawn care experts at Pennington recommend homeowners continue mowing warm-season grasses so long as they keep growing. Lawns may not grow as quickly in fall as they do in spring or summer, and growth may not be as visible to the naked eye during this time of year as it is in other times. Homeowners can routinely check soil temperature to determine if their grasses have

stopped growing. Warm-season grasses tend to stop growing once the soil temperature is consistently at 55 F or below, while cool-season grasses tend to stop when temperatures are 45 F or lower.

Falling leaves have long been a barometer used by homeowners to determine if they need to keep mowing their lawns. That's not necessarily a reliable metric, as grass can still keep growing even if leaves have been falling for weeks. In addition, using a mulching mower

when leaves begin falling is a great way to provide the lawn with nutrients it can use throughout the winter. Some trees shed their leaves more quickly than others, but it's a good rule of thumb that lawns will need to keep being mowed if trees are still retaining more than half their leaves.

A host of factors can help homeowners determine when it's safe to put their mowers away for the winter..





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Plants to be weary of even in the fall

When cleaning up foliage, it's wise for homeowners to familiarize themselves with certain plants that may not be very welcome in their entertaining areas — particularly those that are dangerous. Poison ivy, oak and sumac may be some of the better-known poisonous plants, but there are others that can prove problematic as well.

• **Hogweed:** This is an invasive plant that grows throughout North America but is particularly well-known along the Atlantic coast. The sap in the leaves can cause phytophotodermatitis, which is a chemical reaction after exposure to sunlight. Painful, severe blisters can form on the skin wherever it touches, and hogweed sap may cause blindness if it gets into the eyes.

• **Lily of the Valley:** This plant is known for delicate, bell-shaped flowers and a sweet scent. While Lily of the Valley is not poisonous to touch, if ingested, toxic glycosides in the flowers, berries, leaves, and stems may cause a host of problems, including disorientation, vomiting, blurry vision, and rashes.

• **Bleeding Heart:** Native to woodlands, this perennial loves the shade. It produces unique flowers that resemble tiny pink or white hearts with drops of blood at the bottom. Roots and foliage of Bleeding Heart contain alkaloids that are toxic to animals if ingested in high quantities.

• **Nerrium Oleander:** All parts of this beautiful shrub are extremely poisonous. It should definitely be kept away from pets and treated with caution or avoided altogether.

• **Foxgloves:** Adored among pollinators, Foxgloves produce towering pink and white trumpet blooms in early summer. The whole plant is toxic if eaten, however. People who eat any part or attempt to make tea may find their heart rate slowing down or becoming irregular.

• **Stinging Nettle:** Brushing up against Stinging Nettle can be a painful experience. The plant has tiny stinging hairs on its leaves and stems.

• **Wild Hemlock:** This is a very poisonous member of the carrot family. If consumed, Wild Hemlock, which looks like parsley, can cause health problems. Toxins also can be absorbed through the skin.

• **Deadly Nightshade (Belladonna):** A beautiful plant that produces shiny, black cherry-like berries, this contains a poison that can paralyze the gastrointestinal muscles and eventually the heart. The Royal Horticultural Society says that even rubbing up against it can irritate the skin.

Many plants, however beautiful, can be dangerous if ingested or touched. When working in the garden or on your yard, necessary precautions should always be taken.



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Signs your gutters are in need of repair

It behooves homeowners to learn the signs that gutters are in need of repair or replacement.

Fall is a great time to tackle projects around the house. The weather each fall allows homeowners to make improvements to their homes' exteriors without worrying about extreme heat or cold, while interior projects like painting are made easier because homeowners can open the windows to allow for proper ventilation.

Fall also marks a great time to prepare for upcoming projects that can make winter work that much easier. For example, fall is a great time to take stock of your gutters so you can address any issues before leaves begin to fall or the first snowstorm touches down. Compromised gutters can contribute to water issues in basements and adversely affect a home's foundation if not addressed immediately, so it behooves homeowners to learn the signs that gutters are in need of repair or replacement.

Gutters hanging off the home: Gutters were once installed



predominantly with spikes. However, many industry professionals now install gutters with hanger brackets. Why the change? Spikes loosen over time, leading to the gutters hanging off the home. That can contribute to serious issues if left untreated. Gutters hanging off the home need not necessarily be replaced, but rather secured to the home, ideally with hanger brackets instead of spikes. Brackets hook into the front of the gutter and are then screwed into the fascia of a home. A professional who specializes in gutter repair can

perform this task relatively quickly, and it's an inexpensive yet highly effective solution.

Gutter separation: Gutters that are no longer fastened together can leak and contribute to issues that affect the home's foundation, siding and appearance. Clogs and the accumulation of debris can cause gutters to separate because they are not designed to hold too much weight. Replacement of separated gutters may or may not be necessary depending on how big

the problem is and the condition of the existing gutters. If replacement is not necessary, separated gutters may be remedied by securing the joints, another relatively simple and inexpensive fix.

Peeling exterior paint: Paint that appears to be peeling off of your home may indicate that water is seeping over the edge of the gutter closest to your home. When that happens, water is coming down the side of the house, causing the paint to peel. In such instances, replacing the gutters is often necessary.

Basement flooding: Not all signs of deteriorating gutters are outside a home. Many a homeowner has been flummoxed by flooding in their basements, and such flooding can be caused by aging, ineffective gutters. That's because deteriorating gutters sometimes allow water to leak near the foundation of a home, contributing to basement flooding.

Fall is an ideal time to inspect gutters and have any issues fixed before leaves begin to fall or harsh winter weather arrives.

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