October Gardening To-Do

- October is the month for planting spring-blooming bulbs! Plant tulips, daffodils, and more now. Just be sure to work some compost into the soil or Bulb Booster (bone meal and blood meal are not useful fertilizers) and plant them where they'll get full sun and excellent drainage, such as a slope or raised bed. Water well after planting.
- Now that frost has hit your garden, pull any frost-damage annuals, including those in the veggie garden. Pitch on the compost heap.
- Cut back perennials damaged by the frost.
- After the first frost, dig up and store indoors any tender bulbs, such as gladiolus, cannas, dahlias, and caladiums, that you want to store over the winter.
- Empty all pots and store indoors for the winter. In Iowa's harsh winters, even plastic containers will crack and clay pots will definitely shatter.
- If you have any newly planted trees, especially fruit trees, wrap them with a protective tree wrap now. It prevents sun scald and also prevents rabbits and rodents from nibbling the tasty bark. Remove in spring.
- Perennials and strawberries do best with 1 to 4 inches of a loose, removable mulch over and/or around them. Leaves chopped by running a mower over them are perfect.
- Protect roses. Mound all but rugosa roses around the base with 8 to 12 inches of compost or rich, dark soil to protect the bud union (right above the roots) from winter cold. Hybrid teas, grandiflora, and floribunda roses--the least cold hardy types--are more likely to survive the winter if you also wrap their stems in burlap and twine.
- Plant mums as desired. You can buy them now in full bloom. Be sure to choose hardy perennial types if you want them to return next year. Otherwise, choose more perfect-looking "florists" mums, which are annuals, for just one show this fall.
- Now is the time to force bulbs, that is, plant bulbs in pots to chill indoors and to bring out for bloom, now, as desired.

Notes

- Fertilize cool season lawns, such as Kentucky bluegrass, ryes, and fescues, to encourage good root growth. Also fertilize warm-season grasses, such as zoysia, to prompt them to green up faster in spring.
- Rake leaves as needed. Keep them off the grass--they can suffocate turf.
- Do one final mowing after the frost.
- After the last mowing, run your mower until it runs out of gas (it shouldn't be stored with gas in the tank). Clean up the metal with WD-40 and a rag. Take the blade into a small motor repair shop for a sharpening or take in the entire mower so it's ready to go come spring.

Notes