

OCTOBER GARDENING TIPS

I hope by now you have brought in any plants you want to save for next year. If not, do so ASAP as the weather is changing fast it will soon - if not already - be time to close the windows and turn on the heat. Don't be discouraged if they start to look a little sad for a while, or lose some leaves. They are going through a transition, trying to get used to their new environment. They have been used to daily watering and lots of sun, and won't be getting either in the house.

There's still time to plant spring bulbs.

There are mixed opinions about cutting back perennials in the fall. Most agree that it should be done now - cleaning up the gardens, perhaps remulching - for more vibrant blooms next year. However, I have also heard/read not to do it until late winter or early spring, so the killing cold has a longer trip to the plants' roots. I prefer to clean up in the fall rather than facing a mess in the spring.

Caladiums? Leave them in the ground or pots until the first frost kills the leaves. Then dig them up, cut off the leaves, and dry them for next year. Your cypress vine, black-eyed Susan vines may be starting to look tired by now, depending on how much sun they are getting. Before cutting them down don't forget to collect the seeds for next year. Both are very easy to start from seed. After all the trouble I went through last year starting the black-eyed Susan seeds in the house, repotting the seedlings, inside/outside with the weather, I later discovered them sprouting up all over the gardens where I had had the vines the previous year. Will it happen again - especially if we have a colder winter as predicted - who knows? I've never had the cypress vine reseed the following year. Never fear though, I will have plenty of cypress vine seeds to share in the spring.

With the prediction of a much colder winter, a heavier layer of mulch/pine needles/straw around tender perennial plants might help them make it through (esp. Pineapple sage, perennial lantana, and Mexican bush sage). Some precaution may be needed for potted, perennial herbs which have previously been happy outside all winter. They aren't as hearty when in a pot - the soil usually offers insulation that a pot doesn't.

As the leaves begin to fall, keep your lawn clean. A layer of leaves prevents the sun from getting to the grass's (or weeds in our case!) roots.

Colorful grasses, ornamental peppers are fun to add to the planters or gardens for the fall, though most of them aren't perennial and won't survive a heavy frost. If we're lucky, there's still another month to enjoy them.