



Pest Corner

October, 2007

Fall Garden Notes

Cleaning-Up: Very much worth the effort to reduce next year's plant problems. Fall is the time to tidy up unsightly plants. Cleaning up now will improve the garden appearance and help in the prevention of insect and disease problems next year. Most disease causing organisms such as fungi, bacteria, viruses, and insect pests spend the winter on plant debris and weeds. Getting rid of spent plant material can make a significant difference in next year's occurrence and severity of pest problems.

Vegetables: After harvest, remove the entire plant. This will help with foliar diseases such as late blight on tomato and with nematodes and nematode eggs in infested roots. If there is still plant material in the garden, follow up with tilling or turning the soil over. Most pathogens that cause foliar diseases are destroyed quickly once plant foliage is in contact with the soil and starts to rot. After the first killing frost, remove annual flowers from the garden and till the soil to a depth of eight inches to bury any remaining infested plant material.

Weeds: Remove these from the garden too because, in addition to producing seed, they can harbor diseases and insects.

Herbaceous perennials: Look at plants that are beginning to succumb to the short days and cool nights. After the tops have died back, cut plants back close to the ground to help reduce slug populations.

Trees and shrubs: Many of the organisms that cause leaf spots and twig and branch dieback over winter on fallen leaves and stem tissue. Rake and remove fallen leaves. If the plant showed symptoms of a foliage disease, consider removing some of the mulch and replacing it with new.

Pruning: Prune out branches that have died and check other branches for cankers (areas of dead tissue). The cankered branches should be pruned six to 12 inches below the affected area. In between cuts, disinfect pruning

tools in a 10 percent bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water). Rinse and dry tools well to avoid corrosion.

Composting diseased or infested plants: Composting will kill most insects and disease causing organisms if the pile reaches and maintains at least 120 F for two to three weeks. This is **only** possible if the pile is at least one cubic yard (three feet high and wide); it is kept moist; and contains material high in nitrogen (from vegetable scraps, manure, or grass clippings). Use a compost thermometer (a meat or candy type may work too) to check the temperature of the pile. If sick plant material is not composted, dispose using bags to contain it.

Flagging in trees and shrubs: There is a third-year needle drop or flagging in some evergreen plants. During late September and October, the innermost or older foliage dies and falls away. In some species like white pine and arborvitae, this fall browning takes place rather suddenly. The older needles turn a bright gold-yellow and remain attached for 7 to 10 days, depending on the weather. With strong fall winds and heavy rains, needles fall off quickly. The bundles of needles fall together in pines. The loss of this foliage is not harmful to the tree/shrub. New terminals show new growth that looks fresh and vigorous.

Bulbs and Fertilizer(s) in the planting hole: Bone Meal was once considered an excellent bulb fertilizer. Most bone meal today has been so processed that much of the essential nutrients have been "boiled out". Spring-flowering bulbs (planted this Fall) need no fertilizer for their first season of blooming. A healthy Dutch bulb will already contain all of the food it needs to support one season of spectacular growth. Also, dogs and other "critters" can sniff bone meal fertilizer and be tempted to dig out the bulbs.

Adapted by Cecilia, Ocean Shores, from articles by Don Tapio, GHC Extension Agent.

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