

Garden Line - November/December - 2011

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

Late fall/early winter is traditionally a time of cooler and wetter weather for Southeast Texas. I know it's cooler, but I'm still not sure we are in for our normal amount of rainfall, judging by how this summer went. However, if you plan ahead and have some soaker hoses or drip irrigation for your vegetable garden, you should be just fine.



Late September and early October are the most popular times to get the fall/winter garden started, but anytime between now and early February works, too. All of the vegetables listed in the September/October article (see archive) still apply for planting now. Most garden centers and nurseries will still have seeds and transplants available. Once your seedlings are up and growing or your transplants have had a week or two to grow and put out new roots, give them a light dose of fertilizer to get them going.

This is the time of year when leaves start to fall from our deciduous trees. Please take advantage of this wonderful source of free nutrients for your yard, landscape, and garden. There are a few different options for you:

1.) Mow over them in your lawn and allow the leaf debris to filter down between the grass blades to decompose and provide nutrients to your lawn. If the clippings look too thick, you can rake them out to make the layer thinner, or rake them into piles and carry them to other areas of your lawn or around your landscape.



2.) Rake the unmowed leaves and put them into a compost pile. Turning them every so often and keeping them moist will yield great compost for adding to your garden, mixing in with commercial potting soil, or spreading over your lawn or landscape.



Whatever you do, please don't bag them up to be put out for the lawn waste folks to carry off. Composting is very easy to do, provides you with free fertilizer, and keeps thousands of tons of green waste out of our landfills every year. If you don't want your leaves, consider contacting a local garden club. Chances are they'd love to have them!

Of course, with the approach of Old Man Winter, we need to be prepared to protect our most valuable plants, even in Houston. Get some freeze cloth from your local nursery for protecting cold sensitive plants. If you do it now, you'll be ready instead of scrambling around at the last minute to get it. If you only have a few plants, you can probably make do with throwing an old sheet or blanket over them for a night or two, but if you have many plants like I do, you'll be glad you prepared ahead. I have found that a good way for anchoring or stitching sections of freeze cloth together is to use the large-sized binder clips. This method worked great for me last winter to secure freeze cloth around my banana stems. After the last two winters, I'm hoping for a mild one this year.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all!