



Make no mistake we are in the throes of fall, and very quickly moving toward the longest season (winter, for those of you who have forgotten) in the upper Midwest. The leaves didn't last long this fall and that alone should be a wake-up call for gardeners - take care of those fall landscape chores that have succumbed to human procrastination. Remembering to do a few things at this time of the year will make your life more pleasant in the spring. Really, it will. It isn't too late - but timing is everything when looking at planting, fertilizing, treating weeds, and mulching.

If you have been planning some late season installation of beds, trees, shrubs, or perennials, keep in mind that soil temperatures are dropping every night. And every day wasted decreases the opportunity for any newly planted materials to develop the small roots needed for late season nutrient and water uptake. During the active growing season, the small feeder or hair roots will regenerate, roughly, every two weeks - but as soil temperatures and available soil moisture drops, the roots will develop slower. And at this time of the year, getting moisture and nutrients into the plant system will assure quicker system rejuvenation and growth in the spring. Planting can still be done - to a certain degree. Field grown materials that have already been dug, all container grown plants, divided perennials, and bulbs should be put in as soon as possible. Be careful with field grown trees and shrubs that are dug at this time of the year. There are many that can be dug and replanted and will do fine, while others will curl up and die. This is an iffy seasonal period for successful replanting so carefully choose a knowledgeable plant provider.

Yes, you can still fertilize. Most trees and shrubs actually do better with a late season fertilizing rather than an early fall treatment. Waiting until the leaves have fallen and temperatures are consistently lower will give the trees an opportunity to uptake and store nutrients without the danger of late season growth spurts. That late season growth can be a serious threat to the long term health of plants. Any new late season growth, whether it is shoot, branch, or leaf, will not be sufficiently hardened off to withstand the cold temperatures of late fall and early winter. The resultant dead tissue can be an open invitation to disease and insect infestation. And honestly - which landscape really needs

more dead plant tissue? Lawns should have had their last application of fertilizer at the end of October, but if you haven't had time so far, do it very soon. Cool season turf grasses feed heavily on nitrogen and will appreciate a late season feeding for that early spring growth.

Weeds, weeds, weeds - they are everywhere. If you are not a weed tolerant gardener, later fall treatments for most broadleaf perennial weeds will result in decent control. Why? Well, after a good couple of hard frosts, the plant system moves into food storage mode. All food, nutrients, and moisture are aimed toward the root area to produce and store carbohydrates for the first flush of spring growth. Applying a systemic or growth regulator product at this time will insure that the product will quickly be routed to the roots. Good news for those looking to control or reduce those insidious evil weed populations of creeping Charlie and garlic mustard, among others.

Mulching - an important part of every healthy landscape. But please wait just a bit longer before laying down nice thick layers of it. As good little greenthumbers, you apply mulch, mulch, and more mulch, to help control weeds, moderate soil moisture and temperatures, and add organic goodness to the soil. This time of the year is the only time that I encourage gardeners to wait with the mulch. Right now, the little critters are still looking for winter homes - and will be until the ground freezes solid. Waiting until they have found homes elsewhere will help to protect your plant material from winter damage as that nice, thick layer of mulch will just look like a wonderful bed and breakfast invitation. After all - there are nice tender roots and delicious young bark to chew on, not to mention the soft mulch to rest their weary little bodies in. Wait until the ground freezes solid and let them winter elsewhere.

Remember to make sure that everything gets the equivalent of 1" - 2" of rainwater per week until hard freeze. It is really important that plants get enough moisture to last them through the winter months. Once the ground freezes solid - the only moisture available is what is in the plant system. And although we have had some rain throughout late summer and early fall, we are and have been at a deficit for a few years already, which is very hard on our green friends.