



# HOME & GARDEN

Home and Garden information center • 12005 Homewood Road • Ellicott City, MD 21042 • 1-800-342-2507

October 2009

## Herbaceous Ornamental Plant Tips

### Culture

- Annuals and Perennials - Mums that are planted now should be treated as an annual. They will not become established over the winter. Fall-planted asters, however, will become established. Ornamental kale and cabbage produce a nice show of foliage but usually decline by February. Pansies are a good choice for fall and winter color in the garden. This is a good time to save the seed from annual and biennial flowering plants like cleome, zinnias, cosmos, celosia and butterfly weed.
- Powdery mildew may be observed on plant foliage as a white, powdery coating on upper leaf surfaces. Removed fallen leaves and debris from the garden; no chemical controls are necessary.
- Perennials can be divided and replanted at this time.
- Leave the flower heads on sunflowers, coneflowers, coreopsis and black-eyed Susan to provide winter food for birds.
- Geraniums can be over-wintered in several ways. Entire plants can be brought inside and grown in a sunny window, or cuttings can be taken from existing plants. You can also take cuttings from other annuals like begonias, salvias, and coleus.
- Bulbs - Daffodil bulbs and tulips can be planted now in a sunny spot, in well-drained soil. Tulip bulbs should be planted from mid-October through November. Mix a balanced fertilizer into the planting soil and set the bulbs three times the depth of the bulb width. Mulch the area and be prepared to cover the bulbs with some type of wire mesh material if voles and squirrels have been a problem in the past.
- Mulch - Don't begin mulching your perennials until after the first hard freeze- around mid-November. This will help to keep the soil cold during winter preventing freezing and thawing extremes that often heaves perennials out of the soil.
- Weeds - You may have noticed mile-a-minute vine, also known as tear-a-thumb, (*Polygonum perfoliatum*) creeping around your landscape this summer. This is a very invasive, imported weed that is spreading throughout Central Maryland. The leaves are triangular and the stems and leaves are covered with recurved thorns. This poorly rooted annual can grow 20-25 ft. in one season. It produces attractive blue berries that can be seen now. It's important to control this weed before the seeds develop. Glyphosate herbicide can be used to control it. Hand pulling young plants in the spring is also very effective.
- Early October is a good time to apply glyphosate to bamboo, multiflora rose and other difficult to kill plants, because this is when the plants are transferring nutrients to the roots for winter dormancy.
- Poison ivy foliage can be sprayed with a labeled herbicide now. Multiple applications through the growing season are necessary to significantly weaken or kill the plants. Cut poison ivy plants down to the ground or spray with glyphosate or triclopyr. Wear protective clothing if you decide to handle hairy poison ivy vines wrapped around trees. For control, cut a section of the vine out (several inches) and apply glyphosate or triclopyr to the cut end. It is not necessary to remove the vine from the tree. See our Fact Sheet on Poison Ivy: HG34.
- Other invasive plants include climbing euonymus, five-leaf akebia, kudzu, mile-a-minute, oriental bittersweet, porcelain berry and wisteria. Cut down invasive weeds that are producing seeds. For more information on invasives, see publication HG88 or visit <http://www.mdinvasivesp.org>.
- Groundcovers - This is a good time to renovate your groundcovers if they have performed poorly and look weak and diseased. Mow them close to the ground and rake out and dispose of all plant debris. Wait until spring to fertilize. Fall is also a good time to plant groundcovers on bare and eroded areas.

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- Consider planting a groundcover in areas of your yard where the turf is consistently weak. Groundcovers are especially useful on slopes, in shaded areas and as a border around buildings and garden beds. Soil should be loosened and organic matter incorporated prior to planting. Select plants based on the amount of sun they require. Good choices include striped or spotted wintergreen, trailing arbutus, moss phlox, epimedium, sweet woodruff, partridge berry and ferns. However, do not plant rapid growers near property lines or woodlands.

### **Insects**

- There are three types of slugs found in this area: the spotted garden slug (3-5inches), the tawny garden slug (2-3 inches) and the gray garden slug (2-3 inches). They cause damage (large holes in leaves) to a wide variety of annuals and perennials. Favorite plants include hosta, salvia and marigold. Set out shallow saucers of beer or yeast mixed in water to attract and drown the slugs. Commercial baits can be used, but follow safety precautions on label to protect children, pets and wildlife. For more details on slugs refer to HGIC publication # 92 on Slugs.

### **Disease**

- Brown, bulls-eye lesions on pachysandra are an indication of the fungal disease volutella. Thin out plants to improve circulation and reduce this disease for next year.
- Bacterial and fungal leaf spot diseases of English ivy may be observed. These diseases will weaken your planting and is most severe in thick, overgrown beds where dead leaves have accumulated. Rake out and thin out infected ivy beds. A fixed, basic copper spray can also be applied.
- Periwinkle and vinca are prone to another fungal disease called phomopsis blight that causes plants to wilt and turn brown. Prune out infected plants. No chemical controls are available.
- Web blight attacks low growing perennials like sweet woodruff. Foliage becomes matted and brown. This disease only kills the plant tops, not the crowns. To reduce the incidence of these diseases, remove mulches, work organic matter into the soil and space plants out to improve air circulation.

### **Water Gardens**

- Tropical water lilies will begin to die in October. Don't try to keep them over the winter; they are very difficult to successfully overwinter inside. Cut down and remove all plant parts that succumb to frost and freezing weather. Cover your pond with a small mesh wire screen, like chicken wire, to keep leaves out during the fall and winter. Consider buying a stock tank heater for small ponds. This will prevent the pond from freezing over completely during the winter. As the weather gets colder, stop feeding your fish. They cannot metabolize food easily during cold weather.

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