

# OCTOBER GARDENING TIPS

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By Jeanne Grunert

October is the time of year for pumpkins, squash, scrunching in piles of fall leaves, and enjoying the last of the lovely weather before the winter sets in. Here in Virginia, October can be warm or the first frosts can kill the summer vegetables. At this point in the gardening year, I don't mind so much. I harvest the sweet potatoes and squash, clean up the garden, and enjoy all the spooky old movies on television.

## October Gardening Tips

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- Plant your spring flowering bulbs anytime after Columbus Day. Plant them with the pointy side facing up.
- Look at the back of the bulb package to see how deeply they should be planted. Follow the package directions. A bulb planter, a special tool that helps you dig soil out of the planting hole easily, often has a ruler etched onto the side of the digging part; this can help you measure the right amount of soil to remove from the planting hole.
- Plant early, mid and late blooming bulbs in the same planting hole to ensure a continuous display of color from early to late spring.
- If rodents and squirrels dig up the bulbs, you have several options. Ropel is a liquid that when sprayed onto the bulbs, makes them taste bad to animals. Follow the package directions carefully. If you get it onto your hands, it can make your food taste bad for a while, too!
- Hot pepper flakes sprinkled into the planting hole and on top of the ground are a natural deterrent to animals seeking to dig up your bulbs.
- Rake autumn leaves from lawns and gardens. Shred and add to the compost pile.
- Cut back perennial plants nipped by the frost. Good garden hygiene can prevent insect and disease problems later.
- Take all fountains, bird baths, terra cotta and ceramic pots indoors now. Clean them with water and a good scrub brush before storing them.
- Bring out the bird feeders if they aren't already in the garden! Fill seed and suet feeders and hang them where you can enjoy watching the birds.
- Fertilize autumn lawns. Ask your local Cooperative Extension Office for information, instructions and free handouts.
- Bring house plants indoors. Spray them with the garden hose to remove insects before bringing them inside.
- Now is the time to help your Christmas cacti set blooms. Use a plant light and timer to make sure they get 12 hours of light daily. Evening temperatures of 55 to 60 degrees help them set blossoms for the holidays.
- Buy pumpkins and squash close to Halloween to prevent animals from nibbling them!
- Tie up old corn stalks from the garden to make fall decorations.

- Dry herbs from the garden, especially tender herbs such as basil. To dry them, simply tie them in a bunch and hang them in a warm, dry area. Or spread them on a cookie sheet and let them sit in the warm sunlight during the day. Bring them inside at night.
- You can also use a food processor or chop up herbs, add to a little water, and place in an ice cube tray. When you're ready to use them, toss the ice cube into the pot of sauce or whatever and voila - instant herbs.
- Clean all garden tools now, when you put them away for the season. Take any pruners into the garden center to have blades replaced. This way, they will be ready again in the spring for you.
- Visit your local garden center for end of season clearance sales. Fall is an excellent time to plant perennials, shrubs and trees, and many garden centers want to sell them out as quickly as possible so they won't be stuck over-wintering plants. You may end up with some great bargains now!



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