

AROUND THE YARD

With Reeve Hobbie, Travis County Master Gardener

From summer-like temperatures to winter cold we have had a dramatic change in seasons. So, let me share with you how to close out this unusual year around your yard. For Central Texans, it is now major planting time, winterizing time, and an opportunity to plan for a beautiful spring landscape.

Beginning in January, I plan to provide new articles throughout 2021 on specific topics. I'm going to start with "Everything you need to know about TREES," one of our home's most valuable assets. I will include information on varieties of trees to consider purchasing, planting and pruning techniques and times, the dangers of mistletoe, ball moss and oak wilt. And who knows what other tips I'll throw into each article. Hopefully, you will find the articles full of useful information.

These 2020 month-to-month "Do's and Don'ts" will remain in the Around the Yard archives so you will still have them as a reference next year. Happy Gardening!

November

DO...

- prepare beds for the planting of roses from December through February.
- purchase paperwhites, narcissus, amaryllis and daffodil bulbs for indoor forced blooming. Started at the right times and you'll have a house full of blooms for the holidays.
- finish planting all spring flowering bulbs outdoors (exceptions under "Don't").
- clean up annual and perennial garden beds. Mix in an inch or so of rich compost to prepare the soil for spring planting.
- pick large, almost mature, tomatoes just ahead of the first frost. Store in a cool, dark area until ripe. Average first frost in our area is late November or early December. (It's a moving target.)
- continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons and dianthus, to name a few.
- plant woody ornamental plants and trees so they have a chance to develop a good root system before the hot summer months.
- transplant woody ornamentals from one place in your landscape to another. Cut tops back at least one-third to one-half to compensate for roots lost when digging up the plants.
- prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter and have beds ready for spring.
- continue to mow your lawn occasionally leaving it cut on the high side.
- clean and sharpen all tools. Cover all metal parts with a light coat of oil to prevent rust before storing for winter.
- begin a new compost pile using the abundant fall leaves.
- add mulch in gardens to help insulate plant roots against a possible freeze.
- reduce the fertilizer you put on indoor plants through mid-March.

DON'T...

- plant tulip or Dutch hyacinth bulbs just yet. They need to complete 8 to 10 weeks of refrigeration in a paper bag, never plastic, before going in the ground.
- stop watering your lawn and gardens. At a minimum, when we haven't had much rain, you need to water once or twice a month; more frequently for new plantings. Stick with your watering day according to the city schedule.
- fertilize your lawn. Early October was your last chance until April of next year. You don't want to be encouraging grass growth now when there is a chance of a frost or freeze.
- scalp your lawn. Every long blade of grass helps to protect the roots in winter.
- be in a hurry to prune woody plants like crape myrtles or lantana, just two examples. Late winter is usually the best time. Any earlier and your pruning may stimulate new growth that will only freeze and could possibly kill the plant. So, if in doubt, wait.

December

DO...

- water gardens and lawn before an anticipated freeze. A moderate watering increases the heat-holding capacity of soil by as much as 50 percent.
- cover plants with blankets or sheets, but never plastic, before a freeze. Uncover them when we're safely above freezing temperatures.
- mow fallen leaves to encourage decomposition. Better yet, take up leaves and add to your compost pile or as an added layer of protective mulch in your gardens.
- order difficult-to-find seeds now so you will be ready to start planting them for spring.
- plant those paper-bagged bulbs that have taken up space in your refrigerator these past 8 to 10 weeks.
- purchase and plant roses now until Valentine's Day. After that and you may be too late.
- realize that in Central Texas winter is the best time to plant trees, shrubs and roses.

DON'T...

- allow fallen leaves to stay on your lawn too long. The grass can be smothered or become diseased if an accumulation of leaves is not removed.
- completely stop watering your lawn, trees and gardens. Reduce the frequency or amount of water applied during the cooler months, but don't stop altogether.
- wait until spring to plant or transplant roses, shrubs and trees. Now is the best time to plant and nurseries may have sales.

If you have questions about your yard or garden, please call Travis County Master Gardeners at 512-854-9600. The person at the other end of the line may not have an immediate answer, but they'll research it and will get back with you.

