

WEEKLY NEWS COLUMN
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FALL LAWN AND GARDEN ACTIVITIES

Just because we're experiencing a change in the seasons and our gardens are not in full, green beautiful bloom does not mean there aren't activities we can be doing to prepare for the next season. Fall is an excellent time to evaluate this year's production and make plans for next year.

Gardeners may want to begin with having a soil test completed on their garden or lawn. Fall soil testing allows gardeners and ag producers the opportunity to "beat the rush" in the soil testing lab. Additionally, some soils may require additional nutrients that benefit from being incorporated into the soil for a longer period of time before a crop is planted. Adequate soil fertility is essential to plant growth. It is best to rely on a soil test to determine what nutrients are needed, if an excess of nutrients is present due to previous regular fertilization.

In terms of flower beds, it's time for a clean up and, preparation of bulbs. In October, there's still time to get those spring flowering bulbs in the ground. It is recommended to plant hardy bulbs (especially daffodils) in October to give them enough time to root before winter. But it is certainly not too late to plant them in early November, as long as the soil temperatures are above 40 degrees F, the bulbs should continue root development. Dead annuals should be removed after the killing frost. By getting rid of excess debris in the garden, you can reduce the risk of common plant problems in the spring. Several disease-causing bacteria and fungi over winter on plant debris and can cause diseases the following growing season.

Fall and winter are an excellent time to give some TLC to garden tools. Garden tools can be costly, but with proper care, they can last longer. Store wooden handled tools in a protected location and clean those handles to prevent deterioration. Weathering can raise the grain of wood, resulting in splinters. A light sanding can smooth the handle. Follow that with a light application of wood preservative, linseed oil or polyurethane to protect the wood. Wipe off any excess after a few minutes as oil-based products can attract dirt. Cleaning any dirt off metal parts and coating with a light application of oil can prevent rust.

Late October and early November is the most effective time to control broadleaf weeds in lawns. Weeds including dandelion, henbit and chickweed have begun new growth in late September and early October. Because the plants are young and small, they are easily controlled with herbicides such as 2,4-D or combination products (Trimec, Weed-B-Gon, Weed-Out) that contain 2,4-D, MCPP and Dicamba. Established dandelions are easier controlled in the fall than in the spring because they are actively moving materials from the roots to the top of the plant in the fall. Fall herbicide application results in the plant being killed from the roots up.

These young plants are small and easily controlled with herbicides such as 2,4-D or combination products (Trimec, Weed-B-Gon, Weed-Out) that contain 2,4-D, MCPP and Dicamba. Even established dandelions are more easily controlled now than in the spring because they are actively moving materials from the top portion of the plant to the roots in the fall. Herbicides will translocate to the roots as well and will kill the plant from the roots up. Chemical application should be done on a day that is at least 50 degrees F. The better a weed is growing, the more weed killer will be moved from the roots. Control can still be achieved on cooler days, but warmer temperatures have greater results. As always, homeowners are encouraged to read and follow label directions when applying chemicals to their lawns and gardens to achieve the most effective and efficient results with the least amount of chemical.

For more information on lawns and gardens, contact the Cowley County Extension Office 221-5450, 441-4565.

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