

What to Do in November 2023

Nov. 4 to 10

Perennials: You can put up bird feeders in the garden now and keep them filled. Birds also like a source of unfrozen drinking water. After ground-feeding birds have had their share, remove fallen seed daily to discourage diseases, mice, and other unwanted visitors. Clean feeders at two week intervals, or more often if they become dirty with heavy use. Use window treatments on structures to keep birds from striking the glass. For more information, see <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/advances-in-window-safety-come-to-the-cornell-lab-and-cornell-campus/>

Flowers: If you didn't get a chance to plant tulip bulbs last month (in a location safe from deer) or other hardy bulbs, you can do it now. Don't be stingy. As with daffodils and other spring bulbs, tulips look better en masse, rather than just a few here and there.

Fruits and Vegetables: If heavy frosts haven't yet occurred in your area, they are likely to arrive soon. Covering the plants may give you only a few degrees of protection, so if you still have main season vegetables in the garden, consider harvesting them now. Continue to harvest frost-tolerant vegetables such as beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, carrots, collards, kale, mustard greens, green onions, parsnips, radishes and turnips.

Trees and Shrubs: Looking for a tree with particularly beautiful fall color? You can find native trees with beautiful color at local nurseries. Choose those that will do well in the conditions on the site, paying special attention to sun and wind exposure, and particularly wet or dry places. It's best to finish planting trees that will lose their leaves in the next week or so to give them some time to settle in before the ground freezes. To avoid deep planting that can cause failure of trees and shrubs, remove any soil you see over the root flare (the area where the trunk or stems meet the roots) before planting. To prevent settling, make the planting hole as deep as the rootball. Mound an inch or two of soil beneath the plant in the hole to allow for settling. To facilitate root establishment, make the hole 3-5 times the diameter of the rootball and remove all burlap, twine and wires as you refill the hole with the excavated soil. Water well to settle the soil, but don't fertilize or add amendments.

Lawns: You may not need to mow as often as you did in warmer weather, but continue as long as the grass is growing. When a thick layer of leaves has fallen, rake them up to avoid smothering the grass. You can put leaves to good use in a compost pile. If the leaves disappear into the grass when you mow, there's no need to take them away and this helps to keep beneficial organic matter in place. A mowing height of 3 to 4 inches is better for root development than shorter grass, especially if you remove no more than 1/3 of the grass blades when you mow (taller grass will also hide more shredded leaves).

Houseplants: Stop or greatly reduce fertilizing houseplants until spring. They usually grow less this time of year and won't need fertilizer as the days become shorter. Some houseplants may need less water indoors. Others may need more when the heat is going full-tilt and the indoor air is very dry. Check at least weekly to see how much water the plants need and water accordingly.

General: Continue to look for and destroy spotted lanternfly egg masses on many outdoor surfaces. For more information on how to report spotted lanternfly if it is new to your location, and how to deal with this invasive pest, see <https://westchester.cce.cornell.edu/horticulture-environment/invasive-nuisance-species/invasive-pests/spotted-lanternfly>

Nov. 11 to 17

Perennials: To help prevent pest insects and reduce diseases overwintering in the perennial garden, remove and bury or discard diseased or insect infested plants. (Leave some leaves and healthy plant stems as shelter for beneficials.) Add other debris from healthy plants to a compost pile. Shred it for faster decomposition.

Flowers: Some cold hardy annuals may still be winding down in warm, protected areas. Others may have interesting seedheads or persistent foliage. Dig up canna lilies, dahlias, gladiolus and tuberous begonias after foliage has died back, discarding damaged tubers. Label them carefully. For information on providing proper storage conditions, contact your local Cooperative Extension for advice.

Fruits and Vegetables: You can protect arugula, kale, spinach and other cool-season crops from freezing with a cold frame, plastic sheeting held on supports above the plants. You can also add a floating row cover, which is fabric sheeting that traps less heat than heavier materials. Make sure the cold frame or plastic has venting so that the plants don't get too hot on sunny days. Clean up fruit around trees by removing or deeply burying any remaining fallen fruit.

Trees and Shrubs: To protect broad-leaf evergreens (azaleas, boxwood, holly, inkberry, rhododendron, etc.) from harsh winter winds, consider a burlap screen that blocks harsh wind while allowing air to circulate. Shrubs newly planted this season are especially at risk of moisture loss over winter, and the damage may not become obvious until the next growing season when it is too late for corrective measures. Put stakes for the screen in place before the ground freezes.

Lawns: Keep up with the leaves and continue to mow as needed.

Houseplants: The placement of houseplants indoors is key to their success. Move plants away from radiators, open doors and windows. Never expose plants to a draft, or put them close to, or on a heat source.

General: Once garden plants die back, it's easier to see some weeds that tend to stay green all year. Keep an eye out for perennial and biennial types such as curly dock and garlic mustard, and winter annuals such as bittercress, chickweed and speedwell. Removing persistent weeds now can help to lighten the load next season.

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Here's a great holiday gift for the gardener in your life: a subscription to the Home Garden Lecture Series through Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester. There is one webinar lecture per month from January through May, and a tour in May while space lasts. Advance registration is required. The whole webinar series is \$45; individual webinars are \$5 each. For more information, please call CCE at 914-285-4640, 914-285-4620 or email westchester@cornell.edu Check out the brochure at [add new link](#)

Nov. 18 to 24

Perennials: Once the ground has frozen, cover plants that were newly installed this fall loosely with pine boughs or other loose mulch. This will help to reduce heaving of soil during freeze and thaw cycles, which can kill plant roots by exposing them to desiccation.

Flowers: For fabulous blooms for the winter holidays, try potting an amaryllis bulb. Choose a pot with drainage holes that is no more than two inches wider than the bulb. Add a little potting mix, then the bulb, then more potting soil until the bulb is covered only halfway. Water the bulb well and put it in a warm place (70° to 75° F). From then on, keep the potting mix moist but not wet. When growth appears, move the pot to a sunny window and fertilize the amaryllis approximately every two to four weeks. Turn the pot every day to keep the flower stalk straight. (Still, it might need to be staked.) Flowers appear four to six weeks after potting.

Fruits and Vegetables: Enjoy the satisfaction of homegrown vegetables at the holiday table. This is also a good time to consider sharing a surplus with those less fortunate. Fresh surplus vegetables are appreciated by many food pantries at any time you may have extra.

Trees and Shrubs: Schedule now for pruning of oak trees before next March, while the beetles that transmit oak wilt are dormant and arborists are more likely to have space in their schedules for appointments. Pruning to remove dead, damaged, or diseased limbs and twigs can be done at any time. Compost fallen leaves.

Lawns: Help protect our water resources: When it comes to fertilizer (and pesticide) applications, Cornell Turfgrass expert Dr. Frank Rossi says, “everyone has waterfront property.” Do not apply fertilizer in late fall. Research has shown that November fertilizer applications are not used by grass plants and simply run off the site. New York State law prohibits lawn fertilizer application between December 1 and April 1.

Houseplants: Many houseplants peter out during winter, often because of low light and low humidity. Move plants to a brighter source of natural light or consider supplemental lighting. Resist the inclination to perk them up by overwatering or fertilizing them.

General: Cool weather slows evaporation of soil moisture and after a season with plentiful rain, irrigation should no longer be needed. If you haven’t already done so, drain and store garden hoses. If possible, do this task on a warmer day, when the hoses would be more pliable and easier to coil.

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Nov. 25 to Dec 1

Perennials: Birds can provide an endless source of fascination to watch when feeding on the seeds of coneflowers, perennial sunflower, other perennials (and trees and shrubs). Consider replacing garden plants that performed poorly over the past few seasons with types that provide a source of late-season food for birds. The dried seed pods of many of these plants also look lovely in dried flower arrangements.

Flowers: Florist or pot mums are usually grown as annuals. As such, they are often not winter hardy. Enjoy the show while they brighten up the landscape this fall.

Fruits and Vegetables: You can test the soil for nutrients and organic matter to determine if there is enough organic matter present for optimal plant growth, or if adding more would be helpful. If you haven’t planted a

cover crop, compost, shredded leaves and/or manure can be used in beds to improve the soil. You can just spread this on (no digging required) where it will continue to decay further over the coming months. These materials provide a covering that can also protect the soil in the garden beds from erosion.

Trees and Shrubs: Continue to remove dead or damaged wood from trees and shrubs to minimize damage in winter storms. Oaks may be pruned at this time. Contact an arborist for work on large trees.

Lawns: Before you put your mower away for the season, change the oil, spark plug and air filter and sharpen the blade (or have this done by a professional) so this task doesn't await you in the spring. Clean and put away your lawn spreader. Fertilizer applied at this time may contribute to water pollution as research has shown that it is not used by grass plants and simply runs off the application site. New York State prohibits lawn fertilization from December 1 through April 1.

Houseplants: The placement of plants indoors is key to their success. Never expose pots to a draft, or put them on or near a radiator or other heat source. It's best to check plants weekly to catch problems before they get out of hand. Consider discarding heavily infested plants if they don't have sentimental value. Contact your local Cooperative Extension to identify problems and advice on management.

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