

Can You Dig It

Newsletter of the Piney Hills Master Gardeners of Louisiana

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Fall 2011

Heading towards summer's end . . .

Saying good-bye to *The Heat*

The symbolic end of summer, Labor Day, has come and gone. I wish I could say the same for the record breaking heat of the season, one with over 60 days of 100 degree temperatures and very minimal rainfall. It seems that the cool, fresh air of Fall is taking its own sweet time getting here.

Autumn Equinox: September 23, 2011

Harvest Moon: Full moon closest to the Autumn Equinox

Saying good-bye to *The Birds*



Autumn is the time of year when wild birds are preparing for their long journey south. It is very important to keep your feeders clean and filled with fresh seed and nectar for at least two weeks after the last birds have been observed. Because birds are trying to stock up on their body fat for migration, they will frequent feeders more often. Hummingbirds will consume twice their weight in nectar on a daily basis in preparation for their journey. In fall, the natural sources they have dined at

during the summer may have been depleted. They are counting on using your “buffet table”.

As the days get shorter and the nights cooler, the natural instinct of the birds will tell them to migrate. There is no need to worry about preventing or delaying them from going south because you are providing them with food into autumn. When they feel the urge, they will go regardless of what you do.

A hummingbird will feed at over 1,500 flowers in an average day.

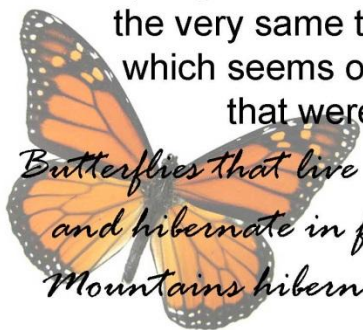
Saying good-bye to *The Butterflies*

Have you ever found yourself at the right place at *just* the right time? Several years ago on an October afternoon, I was lucky enough to witness a huge mass of Monarch butterflies migrating south on a path that took them directly over my house. It was an experience I will never forget.

Monarch butterflies are the only insect to migrate up to 2,500 miles to get out of the cold weather and hibernate. But... the length of these journeys exceeds the normal lifespan of most Monarchs. So how does all this add up??

The Monarch butterflies go through four generations each year. The first three generations hatch from their cocoons and live for up to six weeks, but, it is the fourth generation that continues to live on for up to six or eight months so that they can migrate, hibernate, and then start the first generation in the spring time. Another interesting fact is that the Monarchs use the very same trees each and every year when they migrate, which seems odd because they are not the same butterflies that were there the previous year-- AMAZING!!

Butterflies that live east of the Rocky Mountains migrate to Mexico and hibernate in fir trees. Butterflies that live west of the Rocky Mountains hibernate in southern California in eucalyptus trees.



Saying good-bye to *The Leaves*

As summer ends and autumn comes, the days get shorter and shorter. This is how the deciduous trees “know” to begin getting ready for winter--but not until Nature has one last fling. During winter, there is not enough light or water for photosynthesis. The veins that carry fluids into and out of the leaf gradually close off as a layer of cells forms at the base of each leaf. These clogged veins trap sugar in the leaves. The bright green fades away and we begin to see red, yellow, and orange. Small amounts of these colors have been in the leaves all along; they were just covered-up by the green chlorophyll.

The best autumn colors come when there's been:

A warm, wet spring
A summer that's not too hot or dry
Clear days followed by cool nights

Too much rain or an early frost can diminish the colors. Too little rain can kill the leaves before they even have a chance to change color. Instead of the bright colors, the leaves quickly turn brown.

In a single season a large elm tree makes about 6 million leaves.

**If you have an abundant source of leaves in the fall...
shred them with your lawn mower. Your garden will benefit in a big way. Here's how to use them:**

Use them as mulch in your flower beds
Compost them-they are high in carbon
Improve your soil by mixing shredded leaves right into your soil
Mow over the leaves on your lawn several times- it will improve your lawn by adding nutrients

Fall Gardening Checklist

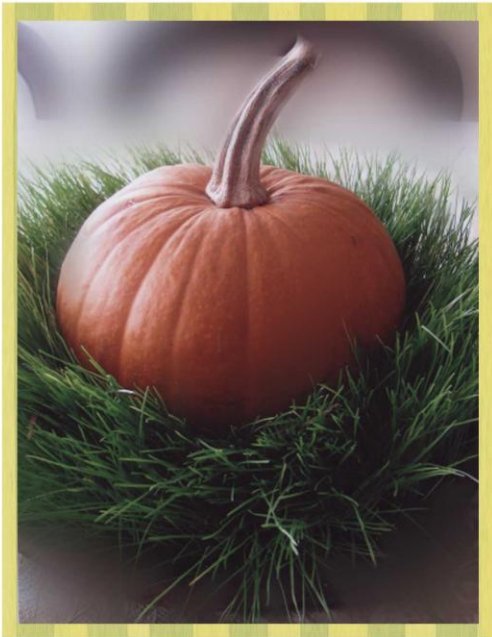
1. **Continue to water your plants.** Going into the winter well hydrated will help keep them thriving. During the really hot weather plants need 1 inch of water every 5 days-preferably all at one time. This deep watering helps the plants develop a deep root system.
2. **Plant trees or shrubs.** By mid October, you can begin to plant or move trees or shrubs that you have earmarked for relocation.
3. **Divide overgrown perennials.** Also, deadhead and cut back diseased plants.
4. **Pull out or dig up summer annuals** that are past their prime.
5. **Buy spring bulbs** while they are in plentiful supply. Wait until the weather cools a bit before planting them later this fall.
6. **Create a new bed.** Do the soil preparation now and you will be ready for spring planting.
7. Fall is a good time to **lay sod** because temperatures are cooler and rain is usually more plentiful than the summer months.
8. **Replenish the mulch** in your flower beds.

Planting a Wheatgrass Centerpiece

One of my favorite fall projects each year is planting a centerpiece of wheatgrass to accent my pumpkin displays. Sprouting wheatgrass is extremely quick and easy.

1. Fill container with potting soil to about 1" below the top of rim
2. Sprinkle with wheatgrass seed and lightly press into soil
3. Cover with a light layer of potting soil
4. Water lightly-I use a spray bottle. Keep moist but not too wet

In about 3-4 days you will begin to see sprouts emerge. Move it to a sunny location so the blades will become dark green and stay short. By day 7-10, the sprouts will be the perfect height to use in your centerpiece. You can place one pumpkin in the center of the grass or stack several mini pumpkins on top of each other.



A pumpkin is really a squash

The Irish brought the tradition of pumpkin carving to America

*The largest pumpkin ever grown
1,140 pounds*

Pumpkins are 90 percent water