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November Gardening Tips



November can bring beautiful weather for gardening in the San Diego area. Warm but mild days and cool nights are ideal growing conditions for cool-season plants. Working in the garden is usually a very pleasant and rewarding experience this month.

If you haven't already, November is an ideal time to add trees, shrubs, and ground covers to your landscape. November can sometimes bring much-needed rain to Southern California, with up to 10% of our annual rainfall falling during this month or in early December. It's an excellent time to prune dense trees and ensure newly planted trees are well-staked before winter arrives.

Here in California, we have an excellent variety of native and drought-tolerant plants that are often still underused in landscapes. If you want to add some low-water beauty to your garden, now is a perfect time to plant natives. Remember, even drought-tolerant plants need watering when establishing roots, so don't neglect them thinking they are good to go once planted!

Edible Garden

Plant onion seeds, garlic, and strawberries in the first half of November, so don't delay. Also, if you haven't finished your fall planting in October, don't wait any longer. Transplant strawberries now so they can develop strong root systems over the winter. Mix in plenty of organic material and compost first to feed the roots through winter and into summer.

Plant cool-season vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, lettuce, and other greens. You might also include beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, and other root crops.

Plant cool-season flowers such as calendula, cineraria, dianthus, delphiniums, Iceland poppies, nemesia, pansies, snapdragons, stock, and wildflowers.

Wild Flowers: For long-lasting color, select a western seed mix that includes both annuals and perennials, or create your own mix with your favorite varieties. Good choices for a wildflower mix include California poppies, larkspur, clarkia, Chinese houses, godetia, and gypsophila.

Natives

November is an ideal time to plant California natives. Many native plants make beautiful landscape choices, including: California Lilac (ceanothus), Toyon or California Holly (Heteromeles arbutifolia), Monkeyflower (Diplacus), California Tree Mallow (Lavatera assurgenteum), and Coffeeberry (Rhamnus californica). Several low-growing varieties of Manzanita (Arctostaphylos) also serve as excellent native ground covers. Visit Moosa Creek Nursery's website for a complete list of available California natives that can be ordered and picked up at our nursery, along with a great selection of natives and drought-tolerant plants from growers we work with up through the Central Coast of California.

New Plantings

Biennials: These eye-catching cottage-garden favorites, such as Canterbury bells, hollyhock, and Queen Anne's Lace, perform best when planted in late fall so they can establish roots before soil temperatures drop and be ready to bloom on schedule in spring.

Plant azaleas, camellias, forsythias, dogwoods, and oriental magnolias so they settle in well. Plant colorful ornamental cabbage and kale for vibrant reds, blues, and purples to highlight other garden colors all winter long.

Pansies are a great choice for quick color, and if you haven't planted them yet, now is the perfect time to get them growing. A wide selection of plants and colors are available at the nursery. Also, now is the right time to plant holiday bulbs, particularly amaryllis and paperwhites, etc.

Garden Maintenance

Hydrangeas: Contrary to some advice or your own temptations, avoid pruning hydrangeas this late in the year. Hydrangeas bloom on one-year-old stems (except for the Endless Summer). Pruning now will remove most of next year's blooms.

Tropicals: Many of these plants will still be blooming and looking good. It's common for them to have a big fall flower burst now. Look for lots of color on plumeria, hibiscus, bougainvillea, and ginger. Let these heat-loving plants harden off a bit before the cool temperatures of late fall and winter.

Reducing or eliminating nitrogen fertilizer and cutting back on watering will help the plants prepare for the cooler months ahead. These warm-weather plants are best planted earlier in spring or summer.

Keep Irrigation Going: During our cooler November days, plants don't need watering as often as they do in warmer months. We should get some rain, but plants will still need irrigation once the soil begins to dry. Continue regular watering during Santa Ana conditions like we've recently experienced.

Automatic sprinklers that turn on when it's raining are a huge waste of water. Consider installing a rain shutoff sensor for your sprinkler system that will stop watering when it rains. Give one last deep watering to grapevines and deciduous trees but stop fertilizing. This will help them harden off for colder weather.

You want to discourage new growth that will be tender and prone to damage. Lightly prune top-heavy trees to decrease wind resistance by removing whole branches so you can see through the tree; this allows wind to pass through. Wait on heavy pruning until the trees are fully dormant.

Plan your dormant fruit tree spraying schedule to align roughly with cool weather holidays such as Thanksgiving, New Year's Day, and Valentine's Day. Key indicators include the fall of the last leaf (Thanksgiving), the peak of dormancy (New Year's Day), and bud swell (Valentine's Day). Spraying during the exact timing of bud swell is especially crucial; it's too early before the buds swell and too late once the blossoms open.

Pest Control: Oil sprays smother the eggs of scale insects, aphids, and mites. Lime sulfur and powdered or liquid copper sprays inhibit the growth of fungus (peach leaf curl) and viruses. Choose a copper spray with at least 50 percent copper. For apricot trees, only use copper sprays (sulfur can harm them).

If the rains haven't thoroughly moistened the soil of the trees to be sprayed, water deeply a few days before spraying. Apply spray on a cool, dry, sunny day during a windless period to reduce evaporation and drift. Ensure all leaf, branch, and trunk surfaces are thoroughly covered with the spray solution. Drenching the soil from the trunk to just beyond the drip line can also help. Reapply if rain falls within 48 hours of the treatment.

Stop watering and fertilizing roses and stop mulching with manure and compost. Lightly prune to remove the canes that have finished blooming, but hold off on heavy pruning until January when the plants are fully dormant. If the weather cooperates, you should see your first blooms about eight weeks after hard pruning.

Renew acid mulches around azaleas, camellias, and rhododendrons. Water them thoroughly to prevent drying out from winter sun and winds. Pinch off small buds on camellias to encourage fewer, larger blooms.