



By Deborah Bengé Frost  
CEA-Horticulture Ector/Midland

November 19, 2007

## NOVEMBER TIMELY HORTICULTURE

We've not had the right conditions for good fall color, but some is finally arriving. In addition to fall color, here are a few other timely fall gardening tidbits to consider.

### GERANIUMS

Have you noticed how fabulous geraniums are looking? It's obvious they like and respond to cooler temperatures. In fact, geraniums do best in fall and spring. Summer heat often slows their flowering and their looks.

Get more mileage out of geraniums by growing them in containers so they can be moved into and out of prominent areas based on their looks.

Another advantage to growing them in containers is that they can be put in a garage or other out building for overwintering purposes. If you do over winter them, water them a couple of times a month to keep them from desiccating.

### OVERWINTERING

Speaking of overwintering, consider these scenarios for tender plants.

Add lots of loose, coarse mulch for extra insulation then cover plants with a bucket, box or basket. If the plants are too tall, you may need to cut or bend their tops so they will fit under the protective structure. Anchor the cover so winter winds don't pluck them up. Water sparingly during the winter months.

Tender plants that come back from the roots could be mulched. Put 5-7 inches of a coarse mulch over the root system and the base of the plant before freezing weather. This will often protect the tender root structure so it will re-sprout next spring.

Some folks go to the trouble of building plastic covered frames to protect tender plants. A frame of 2X4's, wire or pvc pipe fashioned over a tropical or subtropical plant could then be covered with plastic or row cover if it only needs a few degrees of protection.

Plants on a southern exposure, especially those in full sun, could be in a microclimate that will see them through the winter months. If the wall or fence is made of cinder block, brick, rock or other heat absorbing material, a plant gets additional protection from the re-radiating heat that keeps the area warmer than normal.

Plants planted near sidewalks or other heat absorbing materials could make it through the winter for the same reasons listed above. A flagstone, stone or gravel mulch can often keep the roots warm enough so that they will survive cold temperatures.

Covered patios with open sides can be covered with heavy plastic to become like a greenhouse. If the patio is built onto the house, a door or window can be opened so warm air can

move into the space during unusually cold periods. A thermostatically controlled space heater can also keep the space warm enough for plants to survive.

These are some of the most common ways to overwinter tender plants.

#### COMPOSTING

If you don't have a compost pile or bin, this is a good time to start. Gather leaves, garden refuse, grass clippings and other forms of appropriate organic matter for a fall compost pile.

Locate a pile or bin in a convenient but out of view site. Layer brown and green materials in a pile that is at least 3 feet tall, wide and deep. Pieces should be chopped or shredded to about a one inch size. Larger pieces break down slowly, and very fine materials tend to pack and exclude oxygen. Fine materials could be mixed with coarser materials to improve conditions for microbial activity.

Moisten the materials as they are added to the pile. Throw a few shovels of garden soil into the pile to add lots of microbes. For fast composting, the microbes (the decomposers) need a 30:1 Carbon to Nitrogen ratio to feed on. To get that 30:1 ratio, different green and brown materials need to be added to the pile. "Brown" materials include leaves, pine needles, shredded paper, shredded limbs, straw, etc., which are high in carbon. "Green" materials include animal manures, green grass clippings, kitchen peelings, and coffee grounds that are high in nitrogen. If all or most of your materials are dry and brown (high in carbon) add the "green" by using a nitrogen fertilizer like 21-0-0 or blood meal.

Plan on turning or re-stacking your pile about every 2-3 weeks. Re-moisten the pile as you turn it.

With diligent maintenance, you'll have compost in 6 months. With passive maintenance, you'll have compost in about a year or so.

#### SHEET COMPOSTING

Sheet composting is a good way to go in the vegetable garden, and now's a good time.

Take leaves, grass clippings, shredded plants, kitchen peelings and other types of organic matter and put a 4-8 inch layer on your garden. If the materials are mostly "brown," add a little nitrogen fertilizer or blood meal. Turn that under and water it well. Water periodically during the winter and come spring, it should be composted in place. No turning!

#### COPPER CANYON DAISY

Copper Canyon Daisy, *Tagetes lemmonii*, is a flowering perennial that will absolutely knock your socks off this time of year. It doesn't bloom until late, usually November, but it is well worth the wait. This lacy foliaged plant grows 2-3 feet tall and wide and is topped with neon yellow, daisy-like blooms that are just too beautiful. As you might guess from the scientific name, the grey green foliage when brushed or bruised has a strongly fragrant spicy smell. The plant has good pest, heat and drought resistance. It gives tremendous color to the fall garden.

#### PECAN SHOW

The Permian Basin Pecan and Foods Show is scheduled December 3. If you are interested in entering your pecans, get the samples to the Midland or Ector office by Friday, November 30 by 5 p.m. Food entries (yours or your children's) can be brought to the Midland office on Monday, December 3, at 8 a.m. Call 498-4071 for more guidelines on the pecan show rules and guidelines.

And these are just a few of the home garden happenings this fall.

This and all Texas Cooperative Extension information is available to the public regardless of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, socioeconomic level and veteran status.