AROUND THE GARDEN

This month start cleaning up the vegetable garden as plants die or are killed by frost. Compost or burn spent plant material. Finish harvesting tomatoes, squash, peppers and any other vegetables you may have. Whole tomatoes can be frozen for use later in the winter. Harvest sweet potatoes before a frost kills the vines. After the roots are dug, they should be cured to heal the cuts and trigger development of the sugar-creating enzymes. Cure sweet potatoes by storing in a warm, humid room for 5-10 days. A temperature of 80 degrees to 85 degrees and a relative humidity of 80 percent to 90 percent are ideal, though these conditions will be hard to establish around the home, so select a room or building that comes close to these conditions. Store roots at 55 degrees to 60 degrees after curing. The length of time sweet potatoes can be held in storage without sacrificing quality will depend on the environment they are stored in.

Do not prune your fruit trees or small fruit plants such as blueberries and blackberries until late winter, typically the end of February through March in northeast Missouri. Shade trees and shrubs can be pruned in the fall. Although, never prune a shrub in the fall that blooms in the spring, like the forsythia. Wait and prune it after it blooms.

Fall is also a good time to plant trees and shrubs. Never plant a tree deeper than the root flare. Trees planted too deep or too shallow will have problems. Always plant the tree or shrub the same depth it is in the container. Consider planting native trees like the Serviceberry or Redbud. The Missouri Department of Conservation has a list of Missouri’s native trees. Native trees are hardy and adapted to Missouri’s weather conditions. Native trees are habitat for many insects, moths, butterflies, birds and animals. Have you noticed that the trees with a lot of leaf damage from insect holes are usually native trees? Trees like the Bradford Pear, which are not native, have very little or no damage to their leaves. It’s okay to have holes in the leaves. You do not need to spray a chemical. The leaves are food for many insects that are doing very little harm.

On September 10 storms passed through northeast Missouri. We received 9 inches of rain in Adair County. Did you notice after that storm a lot of the trees that were damaged were non-native trees? Everyone wants a fast-growing tree. But, I will tell you, you really don’t! They are weak wooded and prone to splitting apart in storms. Typically, natives like the oaks, come out just fine with minimal damage after a storm. Oaks that were damaged may have already had another issue, such as the oak tree in Rotary Park in Kirksville. By now, all you readers in Adair County have seen the oak tree with
heart rot that split apart. Because that tree has heart rot, it should be removed.

Wait until spring to prune roses. Persimmons will ripen by the end of this month. Always pick and eat persimmons after a freeze. Persimmons can be used to make cookies, bread and pudding.

Enjoy the fall color. Take a walk in your field or on a hiking trail. Enjoy the last days of warm weather before the cold sets in.

NEW ENGLAND ASTERS FOR FALL COLOR

I receive questions in the fall of each year about the pretty, purple flowers growing in fields and road-sides. These flowers are New England Asters, *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*. They are native and produce purple flowers with yellow centers that attract butterflies and other insects. These are a great plant to grow in your garden or landscape for fall color. They are perennial and will live for many years. I have asters in my home garden and at the Extension Center that are 12 years old. You can buy native New England Asters from a native plant nursery or a garden center that sells native plants.

New England Asters are easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun. They prefer moist, rich soils. Good air circulation helps reduce incidence of foliar diseases. Pinching back stems several times before mid-July will help control plant height, promote bushiness and perhaps alleviate the need for staking. These asters are easily grown from seed and may self-seed in the garden in optimum growing conditions. Plants may be cut to the ground after flowering to prevent any unwanted self-seeding and or if foliage has become unsightly.

New England Asters are a Missouri native perennial which occurs in moist prairies, meadows, thickets, low valleys and stream banks throughout the state. It is a stout, leafy plant typically growing 3-6' tall with a robust, upright habit. Features a profuse bloom of daisy-like asters (to 1.5" diameter) with purple rays and yellow centers from late summer to early fall. Rough, hairy, lance-shaped leaves (to 4" long) clasp stiff, hairy stems. Flowers are attractive to butterflies.

The plant has no serious insect or disease problems. It has some susceptibility to powdery mildew. Aster wilt can also be an occasional problem, particularly if plants are grown in poorly-drained clay soils. Tall-er plants may require staking or other support.

Garden uses include borders, native plant gardens, cottage gardens or butterfly gardens. Nurseries now sell many excellent cultivars of this species which are generally considered to be superior garden plants to the species. The species is mostly grown in cultivation by native plant enthusiasts in native plant areas (e.g., native plant gardens, wild gardens, tallgrass prairie restorations).

THE MANY KINDS OF PUMPKINS

There are countless different varieties of pumpkins and winter squash. Depending on the variety, pumpkins can range in size anywhere from tiny to giant. ‘Jack-be-Little’ is a popular miniature pumpkin. It is tiny and will fit in the palm of your hand. When kept out of the direct sun they will last for months. They are perfect displayed on a desk or in a shaded windowsill. They are edible and have a nice flavor.

There are many Jack-o-lantern type pumpkins including ‘Connecticut Field’ the old standard variety, and ‘Howden Field’ the industry standard for the last 20 years. ‘Howden Field’ is deep orange in color, has upright thick walls and sturdy handles. They make a perfect traditional carving pumpkin. Howdens are quite susceptible to powdery mildew, so be sure to keep an eye on them if you plant some in your garden. The ‘Aladdin’ variety is also a modern version of the classic jack-o-lantern. White pumpkins like the ‘Lumina’ are also commonly grown.

If you want to use fresh pumpkin for making pumpkin pies, choose a pie pumpkin. Pie pumpkins are smaller and more dense than jack-o-lanterns. The most common variety of pumpkin is the deliciously flavorful ‘Sugar Pie.’

RAGWEED, NOT GOLDENROD, CAUSES ALLERGIES

Solidago, commonly called goldenrod, is a genus of about 100 to 120 species of flowering plants in the aster family, Asteraceae. Most are herbaceous perennial species found in open areas such as meadows, prairies, and savannas. They will grow in a range of soils and prefer full sun. Goldenrods are attractive sources of nectar for bees, flies, wasps, and butterflies. Honey from goldenrods often is dark and strong due to admixtures of other nectars. However, when honey flow is strong, a light (often water clear), spicy-tasting monofloral honey is produced. While the bees are ripening the honey produced from goldenrods, it has a rank odor and taste, but finished honey is much milder.

Goldenrods are, in some places, held as a sign of good luck or good fortune. They are considered weeds by many in North America, but they are prized as garden plants in Europe, where British gardeners adopted goldenrod long before Americans did as garden subjects. Goldenrod only began to gain some acceptance in American gardening (other than wildflower gardening) during the 1980s.

Goldenrod has been blamed for years for causing allergies, when in fact it is ragweed that is the problem. Goldenrod, Solidago, blooms the same time as ragweed, thus a lot of people think it is this plant that is causing their allergies, when indeed it is the ragweed. Do you ever see goldenrod list in pollen counts on the news? No, but you do see ragweed listed in pollen counts.

Ragweed is pollinated by the wind. Using the wind to fertilize your flowers is a very chancy business. Only by releasing billions of pollen grains into the wind can they ensure that some will find their way to the female flower of another ragweed plant and produce seed. Because they are not pollinated by insects, ragweed does not need visually attractive flower parts. They are an inconspicuous green color. People suffering from allergies in the fall look for a flower to blame and goldenrod gets the rap because it is so visible and abundant. The pollen grains of goldenrod, as is true of all insect-pollinated flowers, are comparatively fat and sticky so that they will adhere to visiting insects and be transferred by them to another flower. In order for a person to be affected by goldenrod pollen, they would have to stick their nose right into the flower just like a bee would!

Just about every insect with an interest in flowers may be found on goldenrod in autumn. The predators of those insects will be found there also. Wheel bugs and flower crab spiders, in particular, like to lay in wait for prey on goldenrod clusters. I have observed many blister beetles on goldenrod this fall.

Goldenrod, Solidago sp., provides nice fall color, especially when mixed with asters in gardens, beds, borders and fields. Goldenrod is a good choice for fall flower arrangements along with asters, chrysanthemums, and any zinnias and marigolds that still might be available in your garden. Seed heads of various grasses and plants are also a nice addition in an arrangement.

GARDENING TIPS FOR OCTOBER

ORNAMENTALS
- Plant spring bulb flowers.
- Continue watering, especially evergreens if soils are dry.
- Container grown and balled & burlapped trees and shrubs can be planted. Loosen the soil in an area 5 times the diameter of the root ball before planting. Mulch well after watering.
- For best bloom this winter, Christmas Cactus, potted azaleas, and kalanchoe may be left outdoors until night temperatures drop to about 40 degrees.
- Cannas and dahlias can be dug when frost nips their foliage. Allow plants to dry in an airy, frost-free place before storage.
- Spring bulbs for forcing can be potted up now and stored in a cool, frost-free place until it is time to bring indoors, usually for 12-15 weeks.
- Transplant deciduous trees after they have dropped their leaves.

FRUIT
- Persimmons start to ripen, especially after frost.
- Monitor fruit plantings for mouse activity and take steps for their own control if present.
- Place wire guards around trunks of young fruit trees for protection against mice and rabbits.

VEGETABLES
- Continue harvesting tender crops before frost.
- Harvest winter squash and pumpkins before frost.
- Dig sweet potatoes before a hard freeze.
- Gourds should be harvested
- Sow cover crops such as winter rye after crops are harvested.

TURFGRASS
- Seeding should be finished by October 15.
- Broadleaf herbicides can be applied now to control cool season weeds such as chickweed and dandelion.
- Continue mowing lawns until growth stops.
- Keep leaves raked off grass to prevent smothering grass.
- Now is a good time to apply lime if soil tests indicate the need.
- Winterize lawn mowers before storage.

MISCELLANEOUS
- Week 1-Fall color begins
- Week 3-Begin peak fall color in maples, hickories, and oaks.
- Week 4-End of peak fall color.

- Missouri Botanical Garden-

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 4–November 13: Master Gardener Training, Mexico, MO. Coordinated by Max Glover, agronomy specialist.

September 16–November 25: Master Gardener Training, Palmyra, coordinated by Max Glover.

October 7- Salt River MG’s tour Branch Range Christmas tree farm. Call Sue for details, 573-795-2334.

October 18: Advanced Master Gardener Training Opportunity; 9:00 am until 2:00 p.m. Elsberry Plant Materials Center, 2803 North Highway 79, Elsberry, MO. See article inside for details.

November 7: Missouri Master Gardener Assn. meeting, 9:30 am, Columbia Public Library, 100 W. Broadway, Columbia, MO. Each dues paying chapter may have a representative at the meeting. Please plan to send a rep from your chapter. This is a great way to be informed of what is going on with MOMGA.

November 30: Please have Master Gardener volunteer hours entered online and up-to-date. I will pull reports from the online system the first week of December. Please do not be late or you will not be included in the county annual reports.

December 5-6: Missouri Livestock Symposium, Kirksville.

February or August 2015: Master Gardener training might be held in Kirksville in February; Thursdays, 1:30-4:30 pm OR next fall. I like fall trainings better as there is more to see in gardens that time of the year. If held in August, it will start on the 20th. If you are interested in MG training, contact me and let me know of your interest and the time of year you prefer.