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Fall Clean-Up

The cooler weather has been wonderful for both animal and plant alike. Recent weather has been a welcome vacation from the heat of past months. Add a little rain here and there and fall is shaping up nicely. Each year we do our best to stay indoors during the dog-days of summer and this year the heat kept us inside more than usual. Gardens and yards may have been neglected while the bare minimum was done to keep things alive, mostly watering. September is a month for renewal.

Make a point to spend time in the garden and begin fall clean-up. Pull weeds and annual plants that are past their prime. Prune off any dead limbs from woody plants and dead leaves from perennials. If plant debris is not diseased it can be added to the compost pile or used to start one that will be ready for next spring.

Remove fruit from under trees and dispose of it. It may feel right to allow the fruit to rot beneath a tree as it adds organic matter to soil. Old fruit actually allows fungal diseases to overwinter close to the host plant waiting for optimum weather conditions. This aids disease in spreading early and farther once spring rains return. The same is true for any fruit that is still attached to trees, shrubs or vines. Remove any old, hard fruit and dispose of it to reduce disease pressure.

If perennials need to be divided or bulbs need to be thinned out, now is the time to do it. Move these divisions or bulbs to other areas in the yard, share them with garden friends or cultivate new friends by sharing what you dig up. Plants make just about anyone smile.

Wait to put down fall mulch until after the first frost. This will ensure that plants that need to go into dormancy do so instead of growing actively.

Are there tender bulbs that need to be removed from soil and stored indoors? Is there an area that needs new spring bulbs? Both of these tasks should be completed now. If new trees or shrubs need to be planted in the yard it is better for the plant to do this in fall rather than spring.

If the soil has not been analyzed in three years, fall is a great time to get this done. If the test shows that the pH is off, a nutrient is lacking or organic matter is required then amendments can be added now so soil will be ready for spring growth.

Finally, don't forget to scout plants for insect or disease damage. Look for black areas or cankers on woody stems. Check for scale or leaf damage caused by insects that suck the juice out of leaves. Check for spots on leaves that indicate fungal disease. Learn what you can about the plants now so that you can be proactive in helping them overcome the pests that attack.

The Extension office is open Monday - Friday, located in Kennett, Missouri at 101 South Main Street (the old bank) on the 2nd floor. For horticulture questions contact the horticulture specialist at 573-686-8064. MU is an equal opportunity/ADA institution.