

Backyard Bulletin

by OSU Extension Agent
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Activities for Fruit Crops Before Winter . . .

Fall is here and winter is just around the corner. With the cold temperatures coming, it is important that fruit crops are prepared. Irrigation should have ceased in September to allow plants to acclimate to the lower light conditions and cooler temperatures. Plants native to North America tend to do this better than our introduced plant types. For example, American grapes, such as 'Concord' or 'Cynthiana' will tend to start responding to shorter daylengths as well as cooler temperatures to prepare for dormancy. European grapes like 'Chardonnay' and 'Merlot' respond primarily to cooler temperatures. Therefore, American grapes get a headstart on dormancy, whereas European varieties are at higher risk of being damaged in an early fall freeze event.

Another important task to do is to remove grow tubes from around plants. Many grape growers and tree fruit growers use these during the growing season to protect plants from herbicide damage and sunscald, but also to speed up the growth of the plant. They work great during the growing season, but if they are left on during fall they will not allow the plant to acclimate normally because the tube heats up with the sunlight and creates a small microenvironment that will be warmer than the outside air. However, once night arrives, the temperature inside the tube will become equal to that of the outside air. The extreme changes from day to night temperatures can cause damage. This is also true during the winter months.

One thing that should not be done is to fertilize fruit crops too late in the season. This generally means no later than July. Nitrogen fertilizer will induce growth of green, succulent tissue that cannot acclimate quickly enough in the fall and thus will not go fully dormant. Often this growth is damaged or killed during the winter and predispose the plant to stress and pest infestations.

The best thing to do to prepare fruit crops for winter is to keep them healthy and happy throughout the year by planting them on a good site, provide adequate water, control insects and diseases, fertilize when necessary, train and prune appropriately, crop load thin if needed and clean out debris that may be a source of inoculum for future years. Preparing for winter is just as important as managing for a good harvest. (*Source: Eric Stafne, OSU Horticulture & Landscape Architecture*)

Suggestions for Ornamentals . . .

October can be a busy time for enthusiasts of ornamental plantings. Here are some suggestions for the coming weeks:

- ◆ Plant cool-season annuals like pansies, ornamental cabbage or kale, snapdragons and dusty miller when temperatures begin to cool
- ◆ Begin planting spring-flowering bulbs like tulips, hyacinths, crocus and daffodils
- ◆ Good companion plants for bulbs are evergreen ground covers such as ajuga, vinca, English ivy, alyssum, potentilla, moneywort, thrift, phlox, oxalis and leadwort
- ◆ Peonies, daylilies and other spring-flowering perennials should be divided or planted now

- ◆ Dig and store tender perennials like cannas, dahlias and caladiums in a cool, dry location
- ◆ Plant fall mums and asters and keep them watered during dry conditions (do not crowd them since they take a couple years to reach maturity)
- ◆ Plant container-grown trees and shrubs this month
- ◆ Check and treat houseplants for insect pests before bringing them indoors and repot rootbound plants

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