



October Garden

by Marilyn Loser

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Only a few California poppies, a sad purple verbena in a pot, and fading chrysanthemums are still blooming in our garden. I can still harvest some herbs – sage, thyme, parsley, and chives – but they are slowly going dormant. And most of the fall-colored leaves have blown off of the trees. Indeed, the season is changing. Even given the three record high temperatures of 77, 78, and 76 degrees Fahrenheit on October 14, 15, and 17, my garden is entering its fall state.

Given the high temperatures and drying wind, the yard still needs water. It's hard to water just enough to keep plants and trees from drying up while not interrupting the gradual hibernation process. Too much water (and any fertilizer) encourages new growth and a reversal of the hibernation process.

This is a great time to plant spring-blooming bulbs. The ground is still supple and it's late enough in the year that they won't try to grow until spring. A few years ago I waited until November to plant and I had to hack out frozen soil with a knife.

I really enjoy using fresh herbs when I cook so I'm thinking of transplanting some sage, thyme, and chives from the garden into a pot for the winter. My experience is they don't thrive as well as in the summer garden, but they do OK in our small indoor greenhouse. If anyone has some tips for growing herbs over the winter, please email me at Marilyn@AlamosaFlowers.net!

It's too early to strew wildflower and other seeds. I usually wait until late November or early December, but the key is to strew them before any heavy snows (I so hope we have some good snows this year!) and to keep them from blowing away.

I remember the fall of 1983 when we had two feet of snow on Halloween weekend and it remained until late spring – my first winter here and I still stayed! We haven't had snow like that in many years, however.

This time of the year, garden chores change. There is very little weeding to do as we mostly kept up with it during the growing season. However, I spied a couple of stealth Siberian elms with green leaves hiding in now bare shrubs. They definitely need to go!

I need to cut back perennials – I usually leave 3-4 inches of stalk to help hold leaf mulch – and rake fallen leaves over the garden beds. I'll hold the leaves down with flattened wire tomato cages and other garden supports to insulate the soil from drying winds and cold. I do think it helps.

Several of our garden beds are in full sun. In the past, when I didn't mulch them and we had a dry winter,

shallow rooted plants like strawberries and ground covers didn't make it.

Now is a good time to spread manure and compost over the garden. Over the winter, the material will break down and provide nutrients for the soil.

A number of websites say to mulch perennials after the ground freezes. I mulch earlier as I think it helps retain soil moisture.

"Ah, yes, autumn, when the trees blush at the thought of stripping naked in public." Robert Brault

"It was one of those perfect English autumnal days which occur more frequently in memory than in life. The rich colours of grass and earth were intensified by the mellow light of a sun almost warm enough for spring..." P.D. James, A Taste for Death