

No Better Time than the Present
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Every year Labor Day signifies the “official” end of summer even though the actual end of summer is September 22nd. Personally, I find autumn is a wonderful time in the garden as leaves change color, the air temperature becomes brisk, and fall blooming plants liven up the scene. Here in South Dakota we spend much of the year getting ready for the next season and early autumn is no exception.

Overseeding your yard if done by mid September will give plenty of time for grass seedlings to become established before cold weather set in. Overseeding is a great way to fill in a lawn that may have suffered drought stress this past summer. Prior to overseeding consider core aeration or power raking. After a long summer of use and abuse to your yard, treat it right and give it a good chance for next year. Fertilize at a rate of one-pound actual N per 1000 square feet. Follow this application with another during mid to late October. Spraying a lawn herbicide now will do a better job now than a few weeks ago. Of course your garden demands some attention also.

Divide and transplant any overgrown perennials. Bearded and Siberian iris, tall phlox, peony, and daylilies will all do well if divided now. Dig up these plants and cut or pull apart the roots and replant in other areas of the garden. Be sure to mulch with straw or leaves, as the roots of these new plants will be a bit tender this first winter. While mulching your new perennials add some shredded bark, woodchips, or another suitable organic mulch around your trees and shrubs. A good layer of 3 - 4 inches is sufficient, being careful not to leave mulch right against the trunk. This will help retain moisture and moderate winter soil temperatures.

Water evergreen trees and shrubs regularly throughout the autumn as evergreens continue to lose water through the winter. Water trees and shrubs by trickling water from the hose end for several hours giving a good deep watering. Irrigating trees now will ensure a sufficient supply of water to combat the winter sun and wind that can deplete needle moisture and cause desiccation and winter injury. Take advantage of the fall to plant additional trees and shrubs in your landscape.

Many nurseries offer reduced prices on landscape material in the fall. This saves them the risk of winter storage of container plants. Cooler temperatures will reduce the amount of care new trees and shrubs need making it very easy to have a successful planting. Give new plants an adequate supply of water and let the roots grow. Tree and shrub roots will continue to grow well into November and maybe even December depending on soil temperatures.

Houseplants that spent the summer outside should be brought in well before frost warnings, as it will be easier for them to adjust to the indoor conditions. Just like putting them outside in the spring, they need to get used to the new environment indoors in the winter. Currently, indoor and outdoor conditions are similar so use this to your advantage. Bring these plants in for the a few hours at a time and then put outside again to help them acclimate to the new indoor environment. Concentrating on these items will enable you to be ready for the fall work that lies ahead, like raking leaves and decorating your yard for October festivities. Get a head start this fall by not letting your work pileup; start now.

Feel free to contact me at 605-394-2188 or email at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu if you have questions or comments about this or other horticultural topics.