

Fall – Time to Tidy Up, Store summer Bulbs and Plan for Next Year

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I always look forward to the change from summer to fall. Although I'm sad to see my summer annuals begin to fade away, I do enjoy the fall scenery – mums, pumpkins, and the leaves putting on their colorful show. Fall also brings the time to tidy up around the home, store summer bulbs, and start making plans for the next growing season.

Don't forget to dig your summer-flowering bulbs and store those that will not survive Kansas winters. Bulbs such as gladiolus, caladium, dahlia, tuberous begonia, calla lily, and canna lily need to be dug and stored to be planted next year.

All of these plants should be dug after frost has browned the foliage. They should dry for about a week in a shady, well-ventilated site such as a garage or tool shed. Any excess soil should be removed. The bulbs should be packed away in peat moss or perlite. When packing, make sure the bulbs don't touch each other. If one decays, the rot won't spread onto neighboring bulbs. Dusting the bulbs with fungicide before storing will help prevent them from rotting.

Caladium should be stored between 50 and 60 degrees F. The rest of the bulbs mentioned should be stored at around 40 degrees. Finding a good storage spot may be tricky. A basement wall away from a furnace is often a good location.

As for spring flowering bulbs (tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and allium), it is time to establish them in the landscape. If you have never planted allium, give it a try! You won't be disappointed with the unique look and purple bloom.

It is also time to fertilize spring-flowering bulbs. With an established bulb bed fertilized in the past, plenty of phosphorus and potassium is probably present in the soil to grow the plants next spring. If you're not sure, take a soil test. A complete fertilizer, such as 10-10-10 or 9-9-6, at the rate of 2.5 pounds per 100 square feet, should be used if the soil needs phosphorus and potassium. This would also equal one rounded teaspoon per square foot.

While you're fertilizing bulbs in your yard this fall, you may also want to take the time to clean up the iris beds. Iris are known for a couple of common problems: a fungus known as iris leaf spot and an insect named iris borer.

Though both cause problems in the spring, now is the time to start control measures. The fungus and eggs of the borer overwinter on old, dead leaves. Removing iris leaves and other landscape debris from the iris bed this fall will significantly reduce problems next spring.

On a side note, away from flowers, October is a good time to plant garlic if you want large cloves next summer. The soil should be fertilized before planting with three pounds of a 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet and mixed into the soil. Cloves should be planted point up and spaced three inches apart and one to two inches deep. The larger the clove planted, the larger the bulb for harvesting next summer. Once planted, water in well and mulch with straw to conserve soil warmth and encourage good establishment. The garlic will be ready for harvest next summer when most of the foliage has browned.

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