

GIVING THANKS!

Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardener

November is a dividing month in some ways and a month for thanksgiving in other ways. And I'm not speaking politically. It's a bridge between summer and winter; it's a last chance to divide spring bulbs and perennials; it's a transition between final, tuck-the-kids-into-bed outdoor tasks and those bring-the-kids-inside indoor tasks for houseplants. And it's a time for giving thanks—thanks for the glories of gardening we've had, thanks for the diminution of outdoor tasks as winter approaches (what can I say? I'm lazy and I don't like the cold, unless I'm inside drinking hot tea and watching the snow come down), and thanks for the plants I'm able to bring inside to keep summer a little longer.

Tucking the kids into bed:

Trees can be planted up until the ground freezes. You'll want to protect young plants vulnerable to winter injury, like azalea, rhododendron, holly, cherry laurel, boxwood, mountain laurel, or those at their northern limit for winter hardiness. Hammer wooden stakes (about as tall as the shrubs) into the ground all around the shrub or shrub row, about 12–18 inches away from the plant. Make a protective barrier by stapling burlap or plastic sheeting to the stakes. Individual plants can be wrapped with burlap and a spiral of twine to hold the burlap in place.

You may want to apply a low-phosphorous fertilizer (*not* the same as lawn fertilizer) to newly planted and young evergreen shrubs and trees in November. However, established trees rarely need feeding, according to a blog put out by Homestead Gardens (<https://blog.homesteadgardens.com/gardening-in-november>).

Speaking of fertilizer, did you know that by law, homeowners cannot apply lawn fertilizers to Maryland lawns between November 15 and March 1 (<https://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/fertilizer.aspx>)? The University of Maryland Extension explains: “Maryland’s lawn fertilizer law helps protect the Chesapeake Bay from excess nutrients entering its waters from a variety of urban sources, including...hundreds of thousands of lawns....When it rains, lawn fertilizer can wash into nearby storm drains and streams that empty into the Chesapeake Bay, [contributing] to the growth of algae blooms that block sunlight from reaching Bay grasses, [robbing] the water of oxygen, and [threatening] underwater life. Lawn fertilizer now accounts for approximately 44 percent of the fertilizer sold in Maryland.”

When you mulch, keep mulch flat (no volcanoes, please!) and at least a couple of inches away from trunks of trees/shrubs. For perennials, surround the crown with a two- to three-inch layer of mulch to protect the plant from heaving during the alternate freeze/thaw winter cycles, as the University of Maryland Extension advises.

How do you tuck your vegetables into bed? Cover garden beds with some kind of organic matter such as mulched leaves, or grow a cover crop to till in next spring. Protect **winter vegetables such as** spinach, lettuce, arugula, kale, and other cool-season crops with a cold frame, plastic sheeting or floating row cover (see the October Master Gardeners' column). Other sturdier root vegetables, such as carrots, can simply be covered with straw or leaf mulch.

Bringing the kids inside: Pay attention to houseplants, both temporary and permanent. Winter is usually a time of slow houseplant growth, but it's important to research the needs of your particular plants. Light, water, and food can negatively affect the plants if they get too much or not enough. Leaves may yellow and droop or drop off; plants may be more susceptible to insect damage.

Light: With winter, the light may be weaker and come in at a slightly changed angle. You'll want to put most herbs where they can get strong, direct sunlight; you might need to augment sunlight with fluorescent light.

Water: House temperatures are also changing as you move from AC to heat, affecting soil and moisture. You'll want to determine if in winter, your plants need a weekly misting (or even a short session in the shower) or prefer to be on the dry side. My mother used to water her house cacti only when weather reports showed that western states were getting rain.

Fertilizer: Because winter is usually a slow-growth period, you may not need to fertilize indoor plants. If you do, begin with half the usual rate of fertilizer.

For more information about gardening, watch for the Master Gardeners' column in the *Frederick News-Post* on the first Thursday of each month; sign up for the *What Can We Do for You* e-newsletter; explore the University of Maryland Extension's web site, <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening>; or call us at 301-600-1596.



A pot of *Rex begonia* "Red Tango," brought inside in late October, basks in a window with southwestern exposure. (Photo courtesy of the author)

Fallen leaves can be shredded with a lawnmower and left to decompose naturally on the lawn, used as a mulch for garden beds, or added to the compost bin. A study by Michigan State University showed that mulched leaves greatly enrich the lawn and soil, as earthworms and microorganisms decompose mulched leaves and turn them into plant-usable organic matter. (Photo courtesy of the University of Maryland Extension)





Wrapping plants with burlap is a relatively simple way to protect the plants from winter frost, snow, and ice. Read more at <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/plant-problems/environmental/wrapping-plants-in-burlap.htm>. (Photo courtesy of www.gardeningknowhow.com)

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.

Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>

University programs, activities, and facilities are available to all without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, age, national origin, political affiliation, physical or mental disability, religion, protected veteran status, genetic information, personal appearance, or any other legally protected class.