

## Horticultural Points of Interest – September 2015



### Preserving winter interest in the garden

- Even spent perennial stems and seeds have uses over-winter
  - Food for birds, for example *Rudbeckia*, *Echinacea*, *Heliopsis*
  - Texture and form; foils for snow and ice (but not yet!!) – think of *Eupatorium* 'Gateway' (Joe pye-weed) and ornamental grasses
- Some pruning is advisable (when plants are dormant)
  - Removing foliage with the potential for harboring disease or insects - *monarda* is mentioned. Also, removing and not composting, diseased foliage. Peony, for instance.
  - Taking out messy or unattractive stems and clumps
- Stems of certain plants (see previous Horticultural Points) should be left in place over-winter, to protect their crowns.

### Evergreens in the perennial border

- Fine-needled evergreen shrubs or dwarf trees add color, form, and texture. Many are low-maintenance once established.
- Choices include dwarf forms of: Juniper (upright or spreading), Hinoki Cypress, *Chamaecyparis pisifera* (thread falsecypress) 'Filifera Nana,' Norway spruce, *Arborvitae*, and Yew (but yews are deer candy...)
- Early Fall is an excellent time to plant fine-leaved evergreens. Some reminders as to technique:
  - Dig the hole at least twice as wide as root mass, but only as deep as the root ball
  - Plant no deeper than the soil level at the trunk, as purchased. Too deep planting can stunt or kill.
  - Remove or cut apart any burlap and (usually non-degrading) twine – make it easier for roots to spread & grow
  - Backfill the hole; water to settle soil but don't tamp it down.
  - Make a moat as wide as the drip line, so water doesn't run off
  - Water consistently into November
- Don't overlook non-woody plants that also reward you with evergreen foliage, such as *Helleborus foetidus*, Christmas fern, *Arum italicum* (but may be aggressive), *Asarum Canadensis* or *Europeum* or *Splendens* (ginger). Many gingers have wonderful foliage.

### Lawns, new and rejuvenated

- Late Summer and early Fall are the best time of year for starting grass seeds
- Choose seed mixes / varieties with their texture, sun needs, and water requirements in mind
- Bluegrass is highest maintenance; fine fescues and tall fescue are less fussy and more shade tolerant
- Tips:
  - Get seed in contact with soil; when overseeding, break up thatch to expose bare ground; after seeding rake or brush gently

- Starter fertilizer is a high nitrogen “rush” to help initial growth
- Moisten the seed at least twice daily; expect 10 days to 2 weeks for substantial germination
- Wait a few weeks before mowing or exposing to lots of foot traffic
- For very low traffic areas there are many alternatives to turf grasses (a future topic?)

**“Insurance coverage” for this year’s arrivals in your garden**

- Shrubs, trees, and perennials – keep up the watering until late October or early November (perennials, until they are obviously dormant)
- After the first year, your plants are mostly on their own

Fred Ehrhardt

Recommended reading:

DiSabato-Aust, Tracy. The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting & Pruning Techniques  
 Eddison, Sydney. Gardening for a Lifetime: How to Garden Wiser as You Grow Older



Fall Aster