

## Horticulture Hints October 2019

And where is autumn? On the calendar, so they say. Not showing its head here in the south, for sure. And it seems that Hurricane Dorian sucked all the rain right out of this state! But one of my favorite things about this time of year in Florida is when the Muhly grass goes to seed. Is there anything more beautiful than that pink ethereal cloud hovering just above the ground?

I tried my best to grow some tomato seedlings for fall planting. Alas, the rain and cloudy weather had other plans: the mildew just wouldn't be controlled. I finally chucked them. So, I go to several of the big box stores and guess what? Their seedlings look as bad as mine had. But since the rain stopped after Dorian I have discovered several volunteers coming up in the pots that held my spring tomatoes! So it looks like tomato season may happen anyway!

Even though it's still pretty warm, nighttime temperatures are definitely moderating. Evenings and mornings are glorious, and the best for getting out in the garden. There are many things that can be done in this wonderful time of year. The growth flushes that your lawn has undergone throughout the summer is pretty much over, so now is time to aerate and fertilize with a high-potassium product. Potassium is the third number on a bag of fertilizer. So on a 9-3-6 listing, potassium is the '6'. Potassium helps your lawn recover from the stress of heat and growth flush, and prepare itself for the winter ahead. October is the latest that you should fertilize here in central Florida, so don't put it off if you want to give your lawn the best chance of looking great for next spring. Fall is also a great time to apply weed control if that's a concern for you. Now is also the time to repair lawns with sod or plugs. Keep the area moist but not wet, and apply a fungicide (if necessary) sometime in the first month. And don't forget to adjust your lawn's watering schedule for this time of year. Lawns need considerably less water now since the growth has slowed down a lot.

Fall is also a good time to fertilize shrubs, including azaleas, gardenias and ligustrum. Also, you may prune most shrubs now, but avoid trimming those winter/spring bloomers, like azaleas, camellias, hydrangeas and poinsettias. These guys have already started the bloom process for

late winter/early spring, and you will just cut off all those beautiful blossoms that you've worked so hard for.

Spring bulbs are not something that are commonly planted in Florida, mostly because the winter doesn't get cold enough to trigger their bloom cycle. However, there are plenty that can be planted now for color in the spring and summer: agapanthus, rain lilies, amaryllis, crinum lilies, dahlias, gladiolas, tuberous begonias, and caladiums can all be put in the ground in the fall. Also, most people don't realize that sunflowers can be grown pretty much year round in this part of the country. There are some great dwarf varieties that grow to less than two feet, but still produce a dinner-plate sized flower. Great for sunny patios.

Now, it's time for my favorite subject: flowers and color. OK, technically, that may be two subjects, but they always seem to go together. Garden mums are the plant du jour this time of year, if you're taking your cue from the big box stores. At least these days, they *do* come in a huge variety of colors. But there's so much more to fall and early winter than mums. Marigolds and zinnias are front runners for brilliant color. Not so available at stores right now. Angelonia and bulbine, also not so available, but will do well if you want grow them from seed. Other flowers that you can encourage for the slightly cooler weather are: pentas, salvias, crossandra, begonias, geraniums, impatiens, and of course, coleus. Surprising color for a foliage plant, and so easy to propagate.

How about trying something a little different for a fall centerpiece? And show off your green thumb in the process? Get a very small pumpkin (coming soon to your local store....), cut the stem and about a 3-4" hole at the top. Scoop out the insides (save the seeds!). Then put a couple holes in the bottom for drainage (you see where I'm going with this, right?). Then, fill it with some well-draining soil and plop in a couple little succulents. Cool, huh? BTW, you could do the same thing with an artificial pumpkin as well.

Happy fall gardening!