

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
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Contact: WSU/Skagit County Extension: 428-4270

Sometimes it is hard for the home gardener to deal with the month of October. There is hard work to do in the garden and many of the bright flowers are just a memory. It is pumpkin time and winter squash and other vegetables remain ready for harvest. Still it seems that time in the garden, in October, is more what was, than what is or will be. Actually, the end of this gardening season represents the early beginning of your next garden season. Looking at it that way sometimes makes the garden chores a little more pleasant. Three chores come to mind as being particularly important in October: assessing this year's garden, cleaning up, and vegetable gardening.

First, walk through all your gardens and evaluate each of them. Note what did well and what did not. If it did not perform well, ask yourself why. Too much water? Too little water? Too little or too much fertilizer? Too much shade? Too much sun? Is it too crowded? These are just some of the questions that you need to ask yourself. Look at your garden overall and ask if you need more plants or need to move or divide ones you already have.

Second, clean up your gardens as soon as possible. Add your healthy plant refuse to the compost pile and remove the deceased plants from the garden area. Clean your stakes and trellises and put them in the shed, out of the weather, so you can easily use them next year.

Third, give special attention to your vegetable garden. Harvest all the vegetables that you can. This is a great time to harvest winter squash. No hurry here just beat the cold weather. Push your fingernail into the squash and if it does not puncture, it is time to harvest. Cut the squash with the stem attached and cure for at least a week at a 60 to 70 degree temperature. Then store at cool room temperature. Decide if you can plant a crop for next year. It is a good time to plant garlic and shallots in Western Washington. Do not forget to clean up vegetable beds as well. After cleanup, you might want to plant a cover crop suitable for winter use. Look to the WSU Extension publication EB1824 for help with cover crops.

Finally, start ordering your seed catalogues and get ready to start the New Year in your garden.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.

