

Fall – The Perfect Time to Plant

So you didn't get around to planting that new tree last spring? And you forgot to replace the overgrown butterfly bush before it grew even bigger? Then spring rainstorms ran you out of the garden before you finished planting the new perennial bed. Don't despair. Rather than admit these gardening transgressions to your gardening buddies, tell them you planned it this way. Tell them you were simply waiting for the perfect planting season – fall.

Why fall? Several factors combine to make fall the perfect season to plant most trees, shrubs, perennials, and ornamental grasses. Foremost is our mild Pacific Northwest fall weather. It's a pleasure to be outside this time of year! Long time local gardeners know that September and October often bless us with perfect Indian summer conditions before winter's first hard frost. And a dry, not too hot, not too cold gardener is a happy gardener.

Most plants also prefer the fall planting season. They find fall soil conditions just right. Fall soils are still warm, and not too dry or wet – perfect for establishing new roots. Fall-planted plants suffer less stress due to transplant shock. Fall's cooler temperatures reduce water loss from leaves, and slower foliage growth rates allow roots to establish quicker. Next spring these plants will flourish. Fall plants also require less hand watering to become established – an unpopular gardening chore soon eliminated by Mother Nature's winter rains!

Need even more reasons to plant in the fall? Okay, okay. Nurseries are less crowded in the fall, and plants are often on sale. Remembering desired changes to imperfect garden areas is easier in the fall, rather than trying to recall them next spring! Fall planting reduces spring gardening tasks. Fall planting encourages gardeners to create gardens with year-round interest, because nurseries prominently display fall-flowering plants - tempting gardeners to take them home. You must agree, there are plenty of good reasons to plant in the fall. Even the worst gardening procrastinators should be motivated to get going!

So now that you're thoroughly convinced fall is the perfect planting season, what next? First, review your garden and list changes you'd like to make – new plants desired, old plants to remove, and plants to relocate. Second, visit your favorite nurseries and purchase all the new plants on your list, as well as some not on your list! Then, start gardening. Remember to plant the right plant in the right place (see [A Place for Every Plant and a Plant for Every Place](#)), and provide adequate drainage. Container-grown plants may be pot-bound by fall, so carefully spread out roots when planting. Always place new plants in the planting hole at the same level as they were in their container. Also, remove any broken branches or stems, but do not prune them. Pruning stimulates new growth, which wouldn't have time to harden off before winter. Don't fertilize fall-planted plants for the same reason. But do amend the soil with compost, and mulch around new plants. Finally, don't forget to water adequately until steady rains signal an end to the mild fall season.

So you see, your spring gardening procrastination was really a blessing in disguise. Now if you can just convince your skeptical garden buddies it was part of your master plan all along, then you can rest easy all winter long!