

Fall lawn care tips



Spring and summer may be the seasons most often associated with landscaping and lawn care, but tending to lawns and gardens is a year-round job. If lawn and garden responsibilities dip considerably in winter, then fall is the last significant chance before the new year that homeowners will have to address the landscaping around their homes.

Homeowners who want their lawns to thrive year-round can take advantage of the welcoming weather of fall to address any existing or potential issues.

• **Keep mowing, but adjust how you mow.** It's important that homeowners continue to mow their lawns so long as grass is growing. But as fall transitions into winter, lower the blades so the grass is cut shorter while remaining mindful that no blade of grass should ever be trimmed by more than one-third. Lowering the blades will allow more sunlight to reach the grass in the months ahead.

• **Remove leaves as they fall.** Raking leaves is synonymous with fall. Some homeowners may wait to pick up a rake until all of the trees on their properties are bare. However,

allowing fallen leaves to sit on the ground for extended periods of time can have an adverse effect on grass. Leaves left to sit on the lawn may ultimately suffocate the grass by forming an impenetrable wall that deprives the lawn of sunlight and oxygen. The result is dead grass and possibly even fungal disease.

• **Repair bald spots.** Summer exacts a toll on lawns in various ways, and even homeowners with green thumbs may end up with a lawn filled with bald spots come September. Autumn is a great time to repair these bald

spots. Lawn repair mixes like Scotts® Patch-Master contain mulch, seed and fertilizer to repair bald spots, which can begin to recover in as little as seven days. Before applying such products, remove dead grass and loosen the top few inches of soil. Follow any additional manufacturer instructions as well.

• **Aerate the turf.** Aerating reduces soil compacting, facilitating the delivery of fertilizer and water to a lawn's roots. While many homeowners, and particularly those who take pride in tending to their own lawns, can

successfully aerate their own turf, it's best to first have soil tested so you know which amendments to add after the ground has been aerated. Gardening centers and home improvement stores sell soil testing kits that measure the pH of soil, but homeowners who want to test for nutrients or heavy metals in their soil may need to send their samples to a lab for further testing.

Fall lawn care provides a great reason to spend some time in the yard before the arrival of winter.

Gardeners and their gardens

(Continued from page 5)

once rested on his ancestral property. He recalls the process: "Labor Day weekend we pretty well made wine. Grapes were ripe — we made wine, we did. We'd make at least a barrel depending on how many grapes we had, if not, if there was more grapes we made two barrels. We picked 'em, cleaned 'em and pressed them into a barrel and let them sit for three days, and then we pressed them out again — the juice — and then we put it in the basement in a wine barrel."

The making of wine was a family affair, shared by all, which brings us to another point. Fresh or preserved, the gardeners don't just keep their produce to themselves...

6) **They're generous with their crop.**

Potato harvesting is a family affair at Wagner's homestead, where roughly 75 pounds of potatoes go into the ground each season. Her siblings help with the digging and harvesting. These days they use machinery to streamline the labor-intensive process. Each family takes their share of the crop. The effort requires teamwork and usually

involves a cookout.

Jackie will then share her crop with co-workers, including many more items than harvested potatoes.

Paul shares crop with family and friends as well. Last season, an abundance of tomatoes allowed Paul and friends to collectively can salsa. He talks of having gifted plenty of his crop already this season, most especially his cucumbers.

Wendholt's tenants certainly benefit from his garden's bounty. In fact, his tenant's mother relieved the garden of ready squash only days before our interview. Roman prefers it that way. When traveling, etc., he likes knowing that ripened crop isn't being left to rot on the vine.

He tells of recently sharing some garden time with his daughter, who now resides in Fort Wayne. "We were out here, and we picked zucchini, green beans, mangoes — or peppers whatever you want to call it — onions, some carrots. We went home, we fixed a big skillet of all those vegetables, and we pretty well ate the whole thing! So we just. We enjoyed it."

The gifting of florals and crop is naturally built into each expert's yearly plan. "We take stuff into work if we got extras," says Jackie. "We'll take it into work and it's like gone in a heartbeat."

7) **They pass along their knowledge.**

The experts agree that beginning gardeners should just go for it!

"Get a tomato plant or two," advises Roman, "and you know, a mango — a pepper — and just plant them. You don't need a big area. You can get a 10 x 10 foot square and just put a few plants out. Zucchini — start with it and go from there."

Henke recommends not being too particular. "I just go to the greenhouse, and I just pick out whatever. I know I'm gonna get tomatoes every year, and other than that, it's just, I'm gonna grow some stuff, basically."

For Henke, joy can be found in fearlessness and simple surprises. "I just seen these potatoes in a bag there at Rural King," he explains, pointing toward his row of frothy green potato plants, "and just grabbed 'em. And I didn't know if they'd work or not, but they did!"

"Just ask," says Jackie, who often recommends plantings and courses of action to co-workers who are beginning to garden. "It's just the little things you learn from people. I mean, I'm still learning on things — what to do, what not to do." She reminds that anything can be googled and local greenhouses are full of knowledgeable staff.

"Get your kids out there," she says. "Just knowing that we're getting the food off our own land — you're working and tilling and you're getting something out of the —" She cuts off with a smile and raises her hands, an invitation to admire the lush, plentiful landscape.

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