October Tips 2012

Mums

Mums, or chrysanthemums, are for sale everywhere. I usually recommend treating these as showy annuals; enjoy their color through the fall then toss them on the compost pile. If you want to try to get them established in your perennial garden, plant them as soon as you get them, and pamper them through the fall. They’ll need to grow a good root system to anchor them in your garden soil before the ground freezes this winter. It’s a bit of gamble as to whether or not they’ll come back next year and bloom but you might want to give it a try. My gardens are so full right now I just enjoy mums in pots on my front porch. They give such a show all fall that I feel I get my money’s worth and then I don’t have to hassle with them the rest of the year.

Peonies and Iris

Peonies and Iris are two perennials that should be cut down in the fall, especially if they had any kind of leaf spotting during the summer. These two are prone to a couple of diseases that overwinter in the infested tissue, so removing all that tissue can help inhibit the disease next spring. It’s not perfect, it won’t prevent the disease from recurring, but it will help. And this tissue should not be added to your compost pile.

Garden Pests

Almost every gardener has commented that this summer was one of the worst for insect pests. There is speculation that the mild winter allowed more to survive than usual, and the hotter, drier than usual weather this summer allowed them to thrive. For whatever the reason, there were a lot of pests this year! Leafhoppers, squash bugs, stink bugs, spider mites, cucumber beetles, flea beetles all seemed to appear in record numbers this summer. Gardeners are asking if there’s anything they can do now to reduce problems next year.

It’s always a good idea to remove infested tissue from your garden. Not all diseases and pests overwinter in plant debris, but enough do that it helps. Do not add materials to your regular compost pile; start a separate pile instead, away from your garden area. If you don’t have the space for this, bag them up or invest in a chipper/shredder that will reduce the heap to something more manageable. But be aware that most pests just move over to weeds, wildflowers and brush to spend the winter, so even though you clean your garden out, they can just move back in next spring. Even so, a good garden clean up helps, and it makes everything look better.

Boxelder bugs

Now that cooler weather has arrived we are getting more calls than ever in our Plattsburgh office about boxelder bugs. As their name implies, these insects feed only on boxelder trees, and cause no significant damage. It’s in the fall when they crawl on your house and porch by the hundreds that they get our attention. They’re not doing any damage, just looking for a cozy place to spend the winter, but they appear in such large numbers, in masses of adults and immatures, that it’s quite upsetting.
There is little to do but wash them off with the spray from your hose. They’ll come back. But even if you spray the outside of your house with insecticide, they’ll still come back once it wears off, and now your house is coated. The spray of water does almost as good a job at no cost and no risk. If you do decide to spray, make sure the product you choose is labeled for that purpose. Read all the directions on the label carefully and follow them exactly.

Once cold weather arrives the boxelder bugs will go into hiding, and only emerge on mild, sunny days on the sunny side of your house.

**Garlic – Be Choosy**

October is garlic planting month. Garlic used to be known as a relatively trouble-free crop, with few insect and disease problems. But unfortunately a variety of diseases and problems are becoming more common. Whether you are planting garlic you grew yourself or bought in, check it carefully before planting and don’t plant anything that looks funky. By this I mean anything with streaks or staining, soft spots, brown patches, shriveled up parts, anything that looks abnormal. This won’t guarantee you won’t have problems next year, but it can at least avoid some potential problems.