



## **Fall is a Fabulous Time to Plant!**

*By Heather Zidack, UConn Home & Garden Education Center*



*Photo by H. Zidack*

There's no doubt that spring planting is exciting. The instant gratification that comes with putting in our new gardens and seeing flowers and greenery right away is unmatched. Late season planting is a different animal altogether. There's a slower pace, less pressure for perfection, and a promise of beauty next season – leaving us the chance to take up other projects in the spring.

Many gardeners will start planting hardy bulbs this fall, but you can do so much more! Planting trees, shrubs, and perennials in the late summer/early fall provides enough time for plants to get established without the heat and drought stresses of summer. New plants installed in the fall have enough time to develop healthy roots and settle in before winter. Allow at least 6 weeks (about 1 and a half months) before the first hard frost to ensure strong establishment. It's less stressful for plants, but also easier for gardeners to plant, water, and support our gardens when the weather is a bit cooler.

Your fall planted perennials, trees and shrubs will also flower “on time” next spring. Whether you've noticed it or not, flowering plants that we buy during the growing season are sometimes manipulated to bloom when you see them on the shelf. And while most plants will settle into their natural flowering cycle after their first year, planting in the fall ensures that you are starting the season with a bed that will bloom as nature intended.

Keep a keen eye out for garden centers that may be trying to sell down their stock, so they don't have to keep it during the winter. Plants may look a little more weathered, and past their prime. But don't fret! If you shop smart, you can find some great plants for fantastic prices.

Shop for plants that have a nice form and strong root ball. Avoid plants that have apparent injury to trunks or branches. Old insect feeding damage, off colored leaves, or some drought damage

may be recoverable. Remember that perennials will be cut back before their next flush, and deciduous shrubs will drop leaves and need pruning regardless of what they may look like right now. Never buy a plant that seems to have issues that you cannot identify, regardless of the bargain. If there are plants that you want that are unavailable, leave space for them to be planted next season.



*Photo by dmo2024*

The lower stress environmental conditions also make it a suitable time to transplant or divide plants that bloom in the spring or summer. When digging plants for transplanting, make sure to dig wide and deep to get as much of the root ball as possible. Division is a common practice with perennials and is as simple as driving a shovel through the center of the plant and digging out half of it to put somewhere else. Larger plants can be divided multiple times.

While it may seem like a promising idea to help push your plants along with some robust growth, fertilizing is not recommended in the fall. Pushing tender growth too close to chilly weather can leave the plant vulnerable to environmental damage, loss of shoots, and possibly even loss of flowers next season. Maintain them with adequate watering and supportive care. Provide good sanitation by removing and disposing of any questionable leaves that fall in your space, especially those from newly installed plants.

Planting in the fall and supporting your fall garden will help you lay a foundation for a successful spring.

If you have questions on fall gardening or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu](http://www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.