

## Let's Talk Gardening

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Tom Harris, Ph. D.

The Country Gardener

### Fall is in the Air, But It Ain't Here Yet

Dang! I thought that with that little cold snap, it was gonna be fall. Now it's summer again. Scheesch! Luckily, though, I got my winterizer fertilizer down on the lawn last Wednesday and then got a little over a half -inch of rain Wednesday night. Am I lucky or what? Just goes to show you what clean living will do for ya. And that reminds me to be sure to tell you that NOW is the time to do your fall fertilizing...any time between now and the first of November. If you use chemical stuff, be sure that it says "winterizer" on the bag. If it doesn't have that on the bag, just be sure that it doesn't say "slow-release" on the bag or in the directions. If you use organic fertilizer, follow the directions on the bag regarding how much to use. The nice thing about organic fertilizer is that you can't burn the grass with it regardless of when or how much you put on (within reason, of course). Generally speaking, it takes about twice as much organic fertilizer as chemical fertilizer because the NPK of the organic is only about half that in the chemical fertilizer; e.g., chemical might be 15-5-10 where organic might be 7-2-2. See? It's all in the numbers.

Fall fertilizing is the most important one of the year. If you put winterizer on your grass, it'll feed the roots which continue growing actively in our winters because our freezes don't go down more than about a quarter-inch, if that. Fertilizing in the fall will get you the first and greenest lawn next spring.

How are your tomatoes doing? If you got them in on time and have been watering and feeding them like you're supposed to, you should have tomatoes about the size of baseballs by this time. Mine are about that size and some are beginning to show signs of changing colors. Yeehaw! But then, because of all the late rains this year, I'm still picking tomatoes off the spring-planted vines...especially the grape tomatoes. I've been picking about a quart every week for a couple of months now and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight.

The broccoli has heads about the size of your fist already. The cauliflower just got in the ground last week...got them at Hill Country Nursery. They were only \$.98 per six-pack. They carry the Snow Crop variety which gets heads about the size of a five-gallon bucket.

My neighbor, Ron, and I have been eating Satsuma tangerines for a couple of weeks now. They get just a little bit sweeter every day; but if we don't quit "sampling" them, I'm not gonna have any to send to my kids up in Kansas. They don't get too many tree-ripened oranges up there.

The fig tree did a really good job this year. It's four years old now and put out quite a few of the sweetest fruits. Personally, I don't care for them much, but my wife does (and so does Ron—it is little reward for all he does for me.) It was really strange how the figs did it this year. The tree was loaded with little green figs about the size of ping-pong balls and they were hard as rocks. Then, about a day or two before they got ripe, they swelled up to the size of a good lemon and turned purple. My wife said that they were really good this year...soft and sweet. Not enough for fig jam yet, but there's always next year.

When the seeds on your favorite plants start turning brown, it's time to collect and save them for next year. You need to be sure to wait until the seeds are dry and just about ready to fall off the mother plant. Put them in zippered sandwich bags with a label stating the name of the plant and the date you collected the seeds...I use old business cards for the labels. Put the seeds in a jar or plastic bottle with a large lid and place it in the frig. They will keep well until next year. In fact they'll keep for several years if you can keep the moisture away from them. That's why you put the date on it. After 3-5 years, if you haven't planted all of them, throw them away because the percentage of them that will sprout will probably be pretty low.

Please be careful about watering your lawn and potted plants right now. The ground is still very wet down a few inches and the grass probably doesn't need any supplemental water at all. Wait until you can see your footsteps in the grass before watering. Just go ahead and turn off the automatic sprinkler system and use it only in the "manual" mode when you have to. Only water the potted plants when the soil is dry down to the first joint of your finger.

On Monday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, I'm gonna be talking about "Building Your Own Inexpensive Greenhouse" at the GVST Gardening Essentials class at the Garden Center at the San Antonio Botanical Gardens at the corner of Funston and New Braunfels. C'mon down. It's free, but they suggest a \$5 donation to offset expenses. It starts at noon and runs to 3:00 pm or so. Bob Webster is the other speaker. If you need directions, call GVST at 210 -522-9220. If you can't make it to the Garden Center, lemme know and you can come over and see mine and I'll show you how to build one for less than \$500

Send your comments and/or questions to [gardener@gvvc.com](mailto:gardener@gvvc.com).