

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



September 17, 2022

Preparing the Garden for Bed

Cooler temperatures with the changing of seasons make working in the garden enjoyable. The timing is perfect to prepare the garden for a long winter's nap. A few of the preparations include testing the soil, planting spring flowering bulbs, destroying vegetable garden plants finished for the season, and mulching.

Don't forget to test the soil in the vegetable garden to know which nutrients are needed to apply right before planting vegetables in the spring. The test results indicate if phosphorus, potassium, and/or lime are needed. If lime is needed, apply it this fall. Not all of the lime is available right away and takes time for it to break down and change the pH. Wait until planting time in the spring to apply nitrogen, phosphorus, and/or potassium. Nitrogen is mobile in the soil and will be lost before spring if applied now.

Instructions for collecting soil for testing from the lawn or garden are available at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service website at <http://daviess.ca.uky.edu/soil>.

In order to have spring-blooming flowers from bulbs, plant the bulbs now. Daffodils, crocus, tulips, and hyacinth bring bright, early color to the landscape. I love to see my snow

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

crocus blooming in February! Try something new such as snowdrops (*Galanthus*) which bloom early too. These flowers make the biggest impact when planted in groups.

Daffodils (*Narsisuss*) in the garden can be divided now and replanted. They need to be divided when the planting has a reduced number of flowers compared to the past spring. While digging them, large and small bulbs will be found. The larger bulbs will bloom next year. The smaller ones will bloom in the next few years when they grow big enough to bloom. Dividing them is a great way to expand a planting area in the landscape or share with a friend.

Other perennial herbaceous plants may need to be divided as well. The preferred date for dividing and planting perennials in the fall is by October 1. This provides time for the roots to grow and hold the plant in the soil. Otherwise, the freezing and thawing of the soil heave the plant out of the ground causing the roots to dry out and die. If plants are planted after October 1, monitor them to check for heaving and gently cover the roots with soil if needed. Mulching the plants after they are replanted helps keep the soil warm and allows for a longer period of root growth to prevent heaving.

Another preparation activity for putting the garden to bed is collecting plant material for composting. Finished compost provides organic matter, which is used to improve the soil in the garden. As the air temperature decreases, the composting process begins to slow down. The choice is to either start a pile now which will take a while to completely compost or collect dry leaves in a trash bag and store them where they will stay dry. In the spring when there is green plant material, the brown leaves to mix them with are available to start a compost pile. For more information on how to compost, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service.

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

As a reminder, removing and destroying weeds and dead plant material from the garden and landscape will help to eliminate overwintering sites for insect pests. In addition, a readily available source of disease-causing organisms is removed. Don't forget to take off rotting fruit from trees and vines. Also, pick up and discard the fruit lying on the ground.

Mulching the landscape, including trees in the yard, benefits plants by conserving moisture in the winter too; it reduces weed competition, moderates winter temperatures, adds organic matter to the soil, and makes the landscape look better. Only apply 2 to 3 inches of mulch. If the mulch is already that deep, then remove some before applying more if you want to have a uniform color throughout the landscape. Roots of plants begin to grow in the mulch to get oxygen if the mulch is too deep.

As the night temperatures become cooler, think about bringing houseplants inside. Inspect the plants for insects before bringing them inside. Treat them outside with an insecticide if needed. Read the label of the insecticide and follow the directions. Make sure the plant is listed on the label. For houseplants, some ready-to-use insecticides are available in an aerosol container which is handy to use.

For more specific information about preparing the garden for the winter, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Leave hummingbird feeders out because the stragglers migrating south need food along the way. Leaving the feed out does not keep them from migrating.

Upcoming Events:

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

“The Power of Native Plants: How to Add Them to Your Garden” is a free program on September 20, at 11:00 a.m. at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden at 2731 West 2nd Street. This free event explains what native plants are, how they are beneficial to birds and pollinators, and how they are beneficial to the homeowner. The Extension Master Gardeners will share their experience with growing native plants and starting a new Native Plant Garden at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden.

“Hydrangeas Are Not All the Same” will be presented on September 29 at 6:00 p.m. at the Daviess County Public Library. It will also be live-streamed. Different types of hydrangeas and how to care for them will be covered.

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