

With the arrival of October and cooler temperatures finally settling on Northeast Georgia, it is time for homeowners to conduct their fall checklist now. Here are some examples of gardening tasks to complete before the winter weather arrives.

### **Soil testing**

Fall is a great time to test the soil in your beds to determine your plants' nutrients and lime needs.

University of Georgia soil tests usually take 7 to 10 working days. So test now to have the results when you plant bulbs and beds.

### **Plant and harvest fall vegetables**

In Hall County, we usually don't get a frost until late October or early November. But be cautious of the occasional early frost (as early as mid-October) and plan to cover your fall-winter garden. I extend my own fall growing season at home with hooped beds with garden fabric. This allows sun and rain in but keeps frost and pests out.

My fall garden includes cabbage, kale, swiss chard, spinach, broccoli, kale, collards, edamame, carrots, bok choy, beets, onions, and brussels sprouts. I will be planting Elephant garlic and regular soft-neck garlic this weekend.

Harvest mature green and pink tomatoes. Store them indoors if a cold snap is predicted.

Harvest herbs, especially basil, before the first frosts. Hang it to dry in a cool and dark place.

Harvest fall potatoes when the tops die down in late October and early November. Store them in a cool

dark place.

### **Winter cover crop**

If you're not growing a fall-winter garden, consider a winter cover crop in the vegetable garden. They provide excellent "temporary" organic matter or green manure when tilled in the early spring.

Another benefit is it keeps winter weeds from thriving. Consider mustard, turnips, radish, ryegrass, winter wheat or winter rye. Legume cover crops are great if you want organic matter and extra nitrogen.

### **Fall flowers**

This is the time to plant cool-season flowering plants such as pansies and violas, digitalis (foxglove), ornamental kale and cabbage, lacinato kale, Swiss chard (especially the ones with colored stalks), snapdragons, lobelia and alyssum (lobularia).

Plant peonies and chrysanthemums for fall color. You can even put in some sweetpeas now, too. But be prepared to cover them if it is a really cold winter.

### **Divide for spring**

October is a great time to divide spring and summer blooming perennials. Soon, the tops of some perennials will “melt” and disappear, making it hard to find them.

Divide perennials, especially spring bloomers. And dig gladiolus as foliage begins to yellow and air dry before storing for winter.

### **Pruning**

Prune broken and dead branches from trees.

Avoid pruning spring flowering shrubs such as azalea, camellia and forsythia to ensure spring flowers. Avoid pruning things that can be winter-pruned until February.

If you prune roses now, they can sprout back in warm spells and get burned back by freezes.

For a monthly list of garden tasks, visit [www.hallmastergardeners.com](http://www.hallmastergardeners.com).