Time to gear up for fall gardening

By Laura Murphy

The month of September in Lake Havasu is our transition month. It starts out with the heat and humidity of August, and ends with the wonderful fall weather we all love. It is refreshing to open the window and feel cool air or to turn on the cold water tap and actually get cold water!

This has been a relatively mild summer but we can still get a thunderstorm or two. Rain may or may not fall with these storms. If your plants are damaged by wind, repair damage quickly. Broken branches should be pruned back to the trunk or to another branch that will now become the leader. This new branch needs to be at least one third the diameter of the broken part in order to function as the new growing tip. Do not leave stubs. They may sprout new growth but will not heal over properly and will never become a normal tree branch.

WATERING - With the cooler weather plants will need less water. Gradually increase the intervals between waterings. Remember that you want the water to penetrate though the entire root zone at all times. This zone varies from about 12 inches deep for annuals to three feet for trees. If you have been watering 30 minutes every day, start watering 30 minutes every other day. During this transition period, keep a close eye on your plants. You may need to add an extra watering day if our temperatures go up again.

FERTILIZING – The magic number to watch for is 100 degrees. When our daytime temperature drops below 100, usually toward the end of the month, it signals the time for fertilizing just about everything. Citrus should be given their tri-annual dose. Lawns can be fertilized and will green up and continue growing for another few months. Roses should be fertilized now to encourage their fall blooming. If you use a foliar type fertilizer, make sure to apply in early morning before the sun gets too high. Always follow the directions when applying fertilizer to prevent damage to your plants. Measure carefully; this is not an instance where more is better.

PRUNING – Prune roses when they have recovered from the summer heat to encourage new shoots and more flower production. Shrubs such as oleander, privit, Texas Ranger and Arizona rosewood can be pruned back at this time. If plants have dead branches from the stress of summer, wait until new growth is apparent before pruning out dead wood. Prune off the dead flower heads of plants such as the Red Bird of Paradise and bedding plants to increase new blooms.
PESTS – As the weather cools we will see a resurgence of plant pests. Watch for infestations of aphids, flea beetles in lawns and cut worms in newly planted flowers. Ants will become more active as they prepare for the coming cooler months. Rabbits have proliferated over the last few months and now their appetites are increasing. Take special care to protect newly transplanted plants. Also protect new growth as it begins to emerge with the cooler weather, rabbits find it especially delicious.

PLANTING – Get ready to begin planting later in the month and on into October. Start seeds for annuals such as carnations, asters, hollyhock, penstemon, phlox and Shasta daisies to be ready for transplant in about 8 weeks. Sow beans and corn right away and you may get a harvest by Thanksgiving. Sow beets, carrots, chard, kale, peas, potatoes and radishes now. Lettuce and cabbage family members should be started in flats for transplanting in late October. Next month will be a better month for planting most trees and shrubs but start planning and preparing the soil now. Prepare vegetable beds and your annual flower beds as well.

Start your herb garden now for a steady supply of fresh herbs through the winter. For those without much garden space, a half barrel or large pot on the patio will work very well. Herbs like well drained, sandy soil and lots of winter sunshine. Most culinary herbs are from a Mediterranean climate, so do not over water or over fertilizer. Try parsley, cilantro, sage, thyme and oregano. It is easier to by small plants which are beginning to show up in local nurseries, but you can also start from seed if you wish.

While gardeners in other parts of the country may be winding down their gardening activities, here in Havasu September is the time for gearing up. So dust off your shovels and rakes, find you good work gloves and get ready to enjoy yourself!

Laura Murphy is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. For more information, contact the Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105 or visit us at the Library, the first Tuesday of every month.

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