

D&D's Annual Autumn Advice

Every autumn, you hear the same advice: fall is for planting. In the Northeast, winter is on its way; is it really a good time to put things in the garden? How late can perennials, shrubs or trees be planted? Take advantage of the short fall planting season in colder climates by choosing smaller shrubs and perennials.

There is no question that fall is a great time to clear out old landscaping and prepare the soil. It is much easier to find landscaping help at this point in the season, but if you do it yourself, at least the weather is more conducive to being outdoors.

Fall is fine for planting or moving shrubs, but smaller plants usually grow more successfully. The larger the shrub, the more likely it is that for winter damage.

One main fall problem is that people turn off their hoses and irrigation systems in September or October and are less likely to keep the new arrivals well watered. Watering well into late fall can make the difference between success and failure.

Transplanting in the fall makes the gardener's job easier for a few reasons. First, new transplants need supplemental water, and we get plenty of autumn rain in this part of the country. (That means less hand watering!) Second, cooler temperatures make the transition less stressful for the plant and reduces needle or leaf drop.

For those planting or transplanting in the fall, applying a layer of mulch afterward is a good idea. It will keep the soil warmer, which will lead to greater root growth and faster recovery of the plant. Remember, too, that for Northeast gardens, there's a narrow window for fall planting. I don't like to plant after the end of October; you want to be sure that everything can get established before the ground freezes.

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