

Around Town

- The big agricultural event of the fall is the New Mexico State Fair, one of the top state fairs in the country. Fruit, vegetable, and flower exhibitions and competitions are scheduled throughout the Fair. Most local garden clubs and plant societies provide special exhibits and sponsor shows. The flower show schedule is available online at the state fair web site; the entry tags are available at the Albuquerque Garden Center 296-6020.
- Albuquerque Daylily Society holds its fall sale early in the month. Call 296.6020 for more information.

October

Weather

Fall is a time of year when we realize how lucky we are to live in New Mexico. The last days of Indian summer are couched between cool mornings and evenings. The air is crisp, but the first frost lies ahead, and things are still blooming.

The weather is becoming “fallish” — rather abruptly at times. October’s highs fluctuate from the upper 70’s to the mid-60’s on average, and the nighttime temperatures average from the high 40’s down to the 30’s. The average date of the first freeze is October 29th although the record is October 8th. This event is typically heralded in the newspaper and on television news. In the East Mountains, the average date of the first freeze is around the first week of October.



What’s Blooming

The roses are enjoying a respite from summer’s heat, and they bloom with renewed vigor. Your garden is a-bloom with *aster*, *chrysanthemum*, goldenrod (*Solidago sp.*), statice, and the last of the roses, *zinnias*, *dahlias* and Maximilian daisy. Saffron bearing fall crocus (*C. sativus*) are a new addition. Hummingbird Trumpet (*Zauschneria californica*) will continue to bloom until the first frost.

Xeric Blooms

The hardier varieties give us a last hurrah, a beautiful burst of color, to say goodbye to summer and welcome winter. These include *Agastaches*, *Asters*, *Nepeta*, chocolate flower, *Rudbeckia*, *Gaillardia*, *Salvias*, and yarrow. Chinese pistache begins its showy fall color change. Hummingbird trumpet (*Zauschneria californica*) blooms ‘til frost.

Everywhere you look there are wildflowers in bloom. The mesas are filled with purple Aster and yellow chamisa (*Ericameria nauseosus*), and the East Mountains are ablaze with sunflowers.

Garden Activities

By the end of the month, the first frost has come, and the garden is mostly gone. You probably quit deadheading six weeks ago, and now the seed pods are all that remain. Before you go whacking indiscriminately through the debris, take a moment to examine the colors and shapes in your garden.

Some plants should be cut back to the ground. But notice how lovely the grasses are with their wispy seed heads ... the ghostly skeletons of the sea holly and thistle ... the fullness of the unclipped rose hips. These are the makings of your winter garden; less obvious, but no less beautiful. In New Mexico, our eyes are attuned to the beauty of subtle colors and textures that manifest in the absence of abundance. The garden will not suffer if you save the final clipping for spring. And the birds will delight in feasting on the seed heads all winter. Many plants appreciate the extra warmth that a coat of dead stems and flowers provides in cold weather.

To Do

- Keep fruit and vegetable debris cleaned up to reduce bug populations. Remove and destroy tomato plants that could overwinter problems.
- If you have not applied a high phosphate fertilizer to the perennial beds this year, do it now to give them a real boost for the Spring. Bulbs, in particular, use phosphate during the winter months. Organic phosphate choices might be bone meal and bat guano or you can find premixed organic solutions at the local nurseries.
- Fertilize the lawn after mowing, to stimulate root growth. Remember to always water thoroughly after any fertilizing, especially with synthetic fertilizers which can burn the grass blades. Organic alternatives to chemical fertilizers are compost, compost tea and fish emulsion plus you don't have to worry about burning the grass.
- Harvest pumpkins after the leaves are killed by frost.
- Dig and divide perennials including, but not limited to: bee balm, catmint, daylilies, hostas, and Shasta daisies. Replant immediately with compost and a high phosphate fertilizer, water well.
- Last chance this year to share lemon balm, strawberries, and penstemon plants with your friends and neighbors.
- Dig Begonia, Canna, and Dahlia tubers and Gladiolus corms for winter storage. Do not let them freeze! Remove loose dirt and dry them in the sun for several days. Store Cannas and Dahlia in damp sand or peat. Store Begonia and Gladiolus in shredded newspaper, dry sand, or vermiculite in a well-ventilated space at 40 to 50 degrees. Check for disease and discard any that may be infected. If in doubt, lightly rinse in a 10% bleach solution, dry thoroughly, and store in an isolated container. Check about every four to six weeks to make sure they aren't too damp and beginning to rot.
- Many gardeners in warmer areas report that these corms and tubers can be left in the ground and will return year after year. They are marginally hardy here, surviving cold nights if the ground doesn't freeze. Experiment with some you don't mind losing.

- Before a hard frost that kills your tender crops, pick green tomatoes and wrap in newspaper. They will ripen slowly between now and Christmas. Take a few and try a green tomato recipe. They are delicious fried -- an easy and light meal after an afternoon in the garden -- or enjoy a green tomato mincemeat pie, cake or cookies.
- Save some leaves and flowers by pressing them or using a drying agent for winter crafts and decorations.

Garden Tip!!! A frost cover of spun polyester on cold nights lengthens the season for lettuce by as much as a month. Annuals for cutting can be prolonged in the same way.

Continue to:

- Weed. Lower temperatures always bring a new crop. Do not compost any weeds that may have seed heads, e.g. spurge and mustards.
- Clean up dropped fruit under fruit trees and clean the areas where vegetables have been harvested.
- Clean flowerbeds as plants die back. Leave most perennials with dead foliage to protect from frost through winter. Very hardy ones that leaf out early, like catmint (*Nepeta*), can be cut back.
- Divide perennials that are too crowded or that are blooming less. Add compost to act as a mulch and to encourage root growth.
- Update your garden journal about what grew well, what you liked, and plants you do not want to plant next spring.

Watering

- Don't water trees this month until after a hard frost; then water deeply.
- Cut back automatic watering systems and reset to come on later in the day and to run less frequently.
- Winterize if necessary by mid-month.

Planting

- Plant hardy container-grown trees, shrubs, and perennials.
- Plant seeds that require cold stratification (i.e. freezes): *alyssum*, larkspur, poppies, gloriosa, daisies, and *rudbeckia*. Also plant some forget-me-nots, primroses, snapdragons, and stocks.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs (tulips, daffodils, Spring star flower (*Ipheion uniflorum*), etc) after the first frost.
- Plant pansies, ornamental cole crops (kale, cabbage, etc.) now through mid-November. Place pots of pansies and kale in protected entryways. They provide color and interest for another 2 - 3 months.
- Container perennials can still be planted. Nurseries have some great deals on plants and pots this month.

- In protected areas you can continue to plant cool season salad greens and radishes.

Pruning

- Cut peonies down to about 6" from the ground and top-dress with compost or manure.
- Gently prune pyracantha for the last time this year. Leave the red berries for the birds and Christmas color.
- Secure and repair trellises.
- **Garden Tip!!!** Perform regular maintenance on your pruners before putting them away for the winter.
- Clean, sharpen and oil them. Replace any broken handles and springs. One trick is to put used motor oil in coffee can of sand then dip each tool in to clean it.



Troubleshooting

Borers — Refer to the June Trouble Shooting section for information on treating borers.

Houseplants

Bring in houseplants that have been summering on the deck or patio. Put potted geraniums in a warm, sunny spot and they will bloom all winter, providing color during the long winter months. Move plants that may need more light to a sunnier spot since indoor light is getting less intense.

Around Town

- The Harvest Fair, another event benefitting the Albuquerque Garden Center, is held the first weekend in November. It's a plant sale that celebrates harvest with pumpkins, pansies, food items, a dried everlasting booth with fall decorations made by club members and other plant related items. Master Gardeners are there to answer gardening questions. Lunch items and baked goods are also available. Free admission 296-6020.
- Get crafty at Ko Shari Garden Club's annual chile ristra making class, held in early October when the chiles are red. Call the Garden Center 296-6020 to find out what supplies to bring.

November

Weather

It's getting colder. November begins with average daytime temperatures around 64° and by the end of the month the average is 52°. The average nighttime temperature is down to 26° by the end of the month. Snowfall (which occasionally begins in October) can be expected now. The average snowfall for the month is 1.1 inches with little to no rain showers.



What's Blooming

It depends on the weather - if it hasn't gotten too cold, you may still have Asters, Shasta daisies (*Chrysanthemum maximum*), and other Chrysanthemums. Pansies like the cold, so if you put some out in September or October, you should have blooms. Ornamental cole crops (kale and cabbage) are bright and colorful.

Cool season grasses are still green, and the trees still have foliage until the first big snowstorms blow through.

Xeric Blooms

Three leaf sumac, native oaks, and ornamental grasses provide colorful fall foliage. Evergreen plants continue to provide winter interest. Rocks and boulders are always in style.

Garden Activities

The garden begins its long winter nap just in time for you to prepare for the Holidays. November is the start of the holiday season. Now is a good time to finish up any chores left undone in the yard. Some dormant plants are beautiful in repose. Others are not.

Start thinking about your holiday decorations. Perhaps make an herbal wreath for your front door or a dried arrangement with some of those gorgeous seed pods, dried flower heads, leaves, twigs and vine trimmings from your garden. Since holly is not a very common shrub here, consider decorating with prunings of other plants that have bright berries, like cotoneaster and *Pyracantha*, which look wonderfully festive.

Now ... move indoors and enjoy the fruits of your labor. Put on a pot of hot mulled cider and curl up to a fragrant piñon fire.

To Do List

- Ensure container plants such as pansies and flowering kale are positioned to receive six hours of sunlight daily. Water once a week.
- If you use manure, now is the time to put it and other soil dressings on your lawns, flower beds and vegetable gardens. Manure is salty. Our soil is salty. A little salt goes a long way in the garden. If it is applied in the winter, there is time for the salt to leach through the soil so that it will not harm new plants in the spring. If the manure is still “hot,” be sure that it has fully aged and no longer produces heat before you plant anything in it. To avoid burning plants it’s best to start with aged manure.
- Finish harvesting your pumpkins, gourds, and ornamental corn.
- Cut back Chrysanthemums and peonies to about six inches after a killing freeze. This will mark where they are planted. Wait until spring to cut them back to ground level.
- Keep Iris and Oriental poppy beds clean of falling leaves.
- Discard both plants and soil from containers in which you planted annuals and if they were healthy, add them to your compost pile. Clean and store the pots or add new potting soil and plant cold tolerant plants in the pots.
- The compost pile is taking a winter break. This is a good time to begin hole or trench composting. Dig a hole about 12 – 18 inches deep. Place your kitchen waste in it and mix with dirt. Place a light covering of soil over the top. Repeat with one more layer and then dig another hole next to it and repeat the process. By late April, this organic matter will be composted, providing nourishment to spring plants.
- Moss and algae growth on brick, concrete, or other paved surfaces create slippery surfaces. As a prevention measure, prune or remove overhanging branches in moist shady areas to improve air circulation and light in these areas. If surfaces are already coated with moss or algae, use a pressure washer to remove the growth. Other environmentally safe products may be available from your local garden center.

Garden Tip!!! Clean, oil, and store your tools for next spring. Wooden handles will benefit from a light sanding and several good rubbings with linseed oil. A bucket of sand mixed with a quart of used motor oil will do wonders for shovels and trowels. Just stick the bucket in a corner with the tool blades poked into the sand and your tools will be ready to go next spring. Clean the lawn mower and remove any remaining gas before storing, otherwise it won’t start in the Spring. Oil all hinges, springs, and moving parts on both your tools and gates.

Watering

- Water trees, shrubs and flower beds once this month.

Pruning

- Prune shade trees if needed.
- Begin pruning evergreens. Use the greenery to decorate your house. Prune unsightly stems and rake up the rest of the leaves. Put some leaves in your compost pile. Put the rest in plastic bags or a dry compost bin. You will need them next spring to mix with your grass clippings.

- Dry leaves keep the grass from turning sour and smelly as it composts.

No space to store unused leaves or prunings? Do not put them in the landfill, instead, set them out for pick-up on the special organic recycle days in the city. Check your water bill for announcements. Or take them to one of several recycle sites listed in the Basics section of this book,

Planting

- Plant pansies, small *Violas*, and sweet peas. Finish planting spring-blooming bulbs. Grow paperwhite *Narcissus* and *Amaryllis* indoors (no pre-chilling needed). They make thoughtful, inexpensive holiday gifts.
- In protected areas you can still plant or transplant cool season vegetables like beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chard, collards, endive, lettuce, mustard, parsley, peas, radishes, rutabaga, spinach, and turnips.
- Plant some herbs in windowsill pots. Dig some of your hardier herbs such as chives and bring them inside — be sure to check for pests on the plants first.
- You can still plant some xeric wildflower seeds: Blackfoot daisies, desert bluebells, globe mallows, firewheel, and Mexican Hat. Be sure to keep the soil moist until they germinate well.



Troubleshooting

Evergreens — Evergreens can be pruned to bring cuttings indoors for decorating. Wash them before bringing them inside; you don't want over-wintering insects in your home. Evergreens that are damaged by wind or windblown sand can be protected with a burlap screen (it allows some airflow) Also to reduce the effects of heavy snow, tie together evergreens such as arborvitae that tend to break open. Use soft cord to avoid damaging foliage or wood. Be sure to untie it in the spring!

Garden journals — Don't forget to finish up your garden journal for the year. Remember to mention the pests you encountered, how you treated the problems, and what the final results were. Eventually you learn what to worry about and what will be minor problems.

Hollyhocks — Cut and remove all hollyhock debris to eliminate the hollyhock weevil. Do not compost the material.

Prepare plants for winter — Tie up vines to reduce rubbing or bruising of branches and stems. Where branches may rub, prune them off. This is not the time for major pruning, just problem prevention.

Sun scald — Protect young or thin-barked trees from the sun by deep watering at least once each month in the winter. If you choose to wrap a tree trunk, use a soft breathable material such as burlap and remove it in the spring. Sunscald is caused when trees begin to warm up on a hotter day, the sap begins to flow, and then we get another freeze. Deep planting (where the root crown is below not at the soil surface) is a contributing factor.

Houseplants

Do not feed them again until March (plant specific). Cooler temperatures and reduced light may cause some plants to lose leaves and start to weaken. Consider moving some plants to get more natural light or supplement with a light designed specifically for plants. Houseplants need less watering now, so be careful to not overwater. As the household furnace starts up, misting and setting out pots of water may be required to supplement humidity.

Around Town

- The Festival of Cranes is an annual event held at the Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge, south of Socorro. This event is held the weekend before Thanksgiving. It includes a native plant sale and a plant walk along marsh trails. Call 505-835-1828 or visit the web site www.friendsofthebosque.org for details.

December

Weather

The weather is starting to get very cold. By the end of December average daily temperatures range between the low 20's at night to the mid-40's for daytime highs. It is typically dry (about half an inch, mean rainfall), and there is not a lot of wind. Snowfall averages 2.6 inches this month.



What's Blooming

Poinsettia, Christmas cactus, Amaryllis and paperwhite Narcissus brighten the indoor scene.

Xeric Blooms

Enjoy the handsome forms of ornamental grasses, conifers, and evergreens with bright berries.

Garden Activities

To Do

- Add new mulch where needed.
- Check out the Plant Sources section of this book for seed catalogs that can be ordered or viewed on the Internet.
- Continue decorating with prunings from the garden. Any plant with bright berries or dried seed heads can look very festive.
- If you forced bulbs for the holidays, move them into good light as the leaves appear. On nice days set them outside during the afternoon.
- Put out water for the birds.
- Start planning now what garden gifts you can give next year.
- October and November plantings go dormant. Covering cool weather vegetables now will give them a boost in February. Be sure to remove frost protective cloth to water at least once a month.
- Begin looking through books and catalogs and thinking about what to plant in the spring. Some shrubs and trees provide color and texture. It's a good time to start thinking about next spring's plantings which can add more texture and color next December.

Watering

- Water everything once deeply: lawns, trees, shrubs, and flower beds. Hose off evergreens.

Planting

- If you bought a live Christmas tree, you will want to plant it in your yard right after Christmas. These plants are stressed by indoor conditions. Don't keep them inside for more than a couple of days if you want a healthy yard tree. **Select a location that matches the mature size** of the tree.
- If the ground is not frozen, you can continue to transplant alyssum, calendula, chrysanthemum, cyclamen, dianthus, Iceland poppies, johnnie jump-ups, pansies, and sweet peas.
- Continue transplanting cool season vegetables until December 15th.

Garden Tip!!! When you are finished with your Christmas tree, the City Recycling Program accepts trees for about two weeks after Christmas. Take it to the location specified by the city. In exchange, you can take home ground-up trees to use as mulch. Bring a pitchfork or shovel; you'll be loading the wood chips yourself into your own truck or bags. It's free! It's weed free! It has sparkles in it, and it smells good! It's a great way to conserve space in our community landfill while improving the soil in your garden.



Troubleshooting

Deicers — If you use driveway and sidewalk deicers, read the label carefully. Look for those that are safe to use around plants. Rock salt, a common deicer, melts and runs into lawns and plantings, killing them and ruining the soil.

Insects — Turn garden soil during cold weather to expose over-wintering insects. Never work the soil when it's wet because clods will form and you'll reduce the oxygen spaces needed by plants.

Plant injury — When decorating outdoors for the holidays, avoid injuring trees and shrubs. Don't allow hot bulbs to rest against bark or foliage. Tie ornaments onto plant material with soft wraps.

Weekly check walk — Walk around the garden examining plants. Look for broken branches and promptly prune them. Be sure to water deeply on a warm day at least once each winter month. Plants such as lavender and rosemary expect winter water to replace the rains they receive naturally in the Mediterranean.

House Plants

- Watch houseplants for aphids, mealy bugs and whiteflies. Spray with horticultural oil.

- Continue to mist and/or provide humidity. The drier air at this time of year makes plants more susceptible to bugs and disease.
- Clean all houseplant leaves with a damp cloth. Wipe leaves with milk instead of water — you'll be surprised with the bright healthy shine it gives glossy leaves.
- Create a cactus or succulent dish garden as a Christmas gift. After assembling the supplies, it only takes about 20 minutes to put one together. Or create a terrarium - see the Specialty Gardens section of this book for how to do this.
- Lightly prune some evergreen shrubs to provide texture and seasonal aroma. Rinse thoroughly to ensure no pests are brought into the house; dry outside, and arrange around some of your plants.

If you are traveling over the holidays and unable to have someone “baby sit” your houseplants, there are several things you can do to assist their survival. Although these techniques may not save every plant, they increase the chances of survival for a 2 to 3 week trip.

- Be prepared for some plant loss or damage
- If possible, lower your house temperature. Plants will use less water and most tolerate temperatures low as 50 to 55 degrees.
- Remove plants from direct sunlight placing them in locations that have bright indirect sunlight. Sheer curtains diffuse light and provide increased security as well.
- To reduce water loss, place plants inside loosely closed plastic bags that serve as mini-greenhouses. If the bags are tightly sealed, fungal problems may develop. A few holes punched in the bags allow for air exchange and reduce the chance of fungus. Clear plastic bags should be kept away from direct sunlight. White plastic bags may be closer to the windows since they reflect surplus light and do not overheat the contents.

Around Town

- Looking for unusual Christmas gifts shop the annual Holiday Fair which takes place the first full weekend (Fri and Sat) of December from 9 – 4 at the Albuquerque Garden Center. This don't miss event includes a large holiday gift and craft fair; fresh cut garlands from northern NM; fresh wreaths; lots of different types and sizes of poinsettias, cyclamen, Christmas cactus, a variety of baked goods, and of course, lunch! Call 296-6020 for dates. This is a fund raiser for the Council of Albuquerque Garden Clubs.
- Check out the Rio Grande Botanic Garden in December for a stunning display of thousands of poinsettias in many different colors. Don't miss the River of Lights, a winter wonderland with over a millions lights, carolers, dazzling trees, wreaths and a Santa to visit. Hot chocolate and cider are served. Call 764-6200 or use the web site at www.cabq.gov for details. Dress very warmly.

