

October Top 10 Gardening Tips for a Healthy, Colorful Landscape

Fall is one of the most rewarding times to be in the garden. The air is crisp, the colors are rich, and the work you put in now sets your landscape up for a healthier, more vibrant spring. October may feel like a time of winding down, but in reality, it's a month of preparation, protection, and planting.

Here are our **Top 10 Gardening Tips for October**, complete with practical guidance, pro tips, and quick-reference charts to make your fall gardening both productive and enjoyable.

DOWNLOAD THIS FALL GARDENING GUIDE!

1. Enjoy the Fall Color

Autumn in our region delivers a spectacular show of color from trees, shrubs, and perennials, often lasting up to six weeks. Different plants turn at different times, so your yard can transform week by week with flaming reds, glowing oranges, and golden yellows.

- **Trees for brilliance:** Maples, oaks, and serviceberries blaze with reds and oranges, while aspen, birches and ginkgoes shine in gold.
- **Shrubs with lasting hues:** Burning bush, viburnum, and sumac add deep crimson, while spirea and oakleaf hydrangea varieties shift into russet and burgundy.
- **Perennials with fall flair:** Sedum, rudbeckia, and ornamental grasses carry color well into the season, with seedheads that catch the autumn light.

Plant a mix of early- and late-turning varieties for weeks of changing color and consider bark textures like birch or dogwood for winter interest once leaves fall.

2. Fertilize for Winter Strength

Fall fertilizing helps plants store energy in their roots, so they bounce back strong in spring.

- **Lawns:** Apply a Fall & Winter Fertilizer or Multi-Purpose 16-16-16 to encourage root development. Aerate and overseed thinning areas before fertilizing for best results.
- **Trees and Shrubs:** Feed with a balanced granular fertilizer to strengthen roots and prepare flower buds.

- **Flowers & Perennials:** Use organic blends like Sustane (8-2-4 or 4-6-4).
- **Bulbs:** Add bone meal to planting holes for healthy spring blooms.
- **Roses:** Stop fertilizing this month to avoid stimulating tender growth that frost could damage.

Timing matters: Apply fertilizer ahead of a deep watering, not before heavy rain, to prevent nutrient loss.

Quick Fertilizer Guide

Plant Type	Fertilizer	Why It Helps Now
Lawn	Fall & Winter Fertilizer / 16-16-16	Builds roots, prepares turf for spring
Trees & Shrubs	Balanced granular (16-16-16)	Supports roots & spring blooms
Flowers & Perennials	Sustane 8-2-4 or 4-6-4	Improves soil health
Bulbs	Bone meal	Encourages larger blooms
Roses	Stop fertilizing	Prevents frost-damaged growth

3. Harvest and Clean Up

October is cleanup month — harvest what’s left and clear out what’s done.

- Dig potatoes and lift gladiolas, store gladiola corms in a cool, dry spot.
- Clear spent annuals from beds and ponds to prevent pests and disease.
- Plant garlic: separate bulbs into cloves and plant the largest ones 1–2 inches deep, 4–8 inches apart.
- Start a compost pile with your fall debris (but skip diseased plants).
- Reseed bare lawn patches and mulch lightly with compost to encourage sprouting.

Quick Harvest and Clean Up Guide

Task	What to Save	What to Discard
Harvest potatoes & gladiolas	Store corms	N/A
Clear beds	Healthy stems → compost	Diseased plants
Plant garlic	Largest cloves	Small cloves → kitchen
Composting	Browns + greens	Weeds w/seeds, diseased foliage
Lawn repair	Fresh seedlings	Thatch, dead grass
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4. Keep Watering—Even in Fall

Cooler weather doesn't mean plants stop needing water. October is often dry, and roots are still active.

- **Lawns:** About 1 inch per month.
- **Trees & Shrubs:** Deep soak to 18 inches. Younger plants need water to the drip line; older trees just outside it.
- **Perennials:** Keep moist until frost, then gradually reduce to “harden off.”
- **Broadleaf Evergreens:** A final deep soak before the ground freezes prevents winter burn.
- **Irrigation tips:** Rainfall is rarely enough. Water monthly during fall and winter if dry, then drain irrigation lines to prevent freeze damage.

Quick Watering Guide

[Download our Winter Watering Guide to get a look ahead!](#)

5. Protect Broadleaf Evergreens

Rhododendrons, Oregon grape, pieris, heavenly bamboo, and euonymus are prone to “winter burn.”

- Water deeply before the ground freezes.
- Apply anti-desiccant sprays (Cloud Cover or Wilt Stop) now and monthly through March.
- Mulch with 2–3 inches of bark to insulate soil.
- Set up burlap wind screens for exposed plants — never use plastic.
- Avoid brushing off snow; branches are brittle when frozen.

Quick Evergreen Protection Guide

Task	What to Do	When
Water	Deep soak to 18"	Every 2–3 weeks until freeze
Spray	Cloud Cover/Wilt Stop	Oct, then monthly
Mulch	2–3" shredded bark	Before freeze
Wind shield	Burlap or lath screen	Before harsh winds
Snow care	Don't brush snow	Winter storms

6. Prepare Your Pond for Winter

Keep your pond healthy by removing debris and protecting fish.

- Remove hardy water plants to a sheltered spot; discard tender annuals.
- Skim leaves daily and clean filters; tannins from oak and maple leaves are toxic.
- Cut back lilies and marginals; leave hollow stems just above water.
- Feed fish less as water cools; stop completely below 50°F.
- Raise the pump higher to keep the bottom water warmer and surface open for oxygen exchange.

Quick Pond Winterizing Guide

Task	What to Do	Why
Plants	Remove hardy; discard tender	Prevents freeze & rot
Leaves	Skim daily, net pond	Stops tannins, keeps water clear
Trim	Cut lilies & marginals	Prevents decomposition
Fish	Switch to carbs, stop <50°F	Keeps fish healthy
Pump	Raise pump, keep running	Maintains oxygen flow

7. Plant Spring-Flowering Bulbs

Nothing lifts the spirit like the first bulbs of spring.

- Plant crocus, tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths now.
- Depth: 2–3× the bulb’s height; usually 4–8 inches deep.
- Add compost or bone meal for nutrients.
- Garlic is a bulb too — plant cloves 1–2 inches deep, 4–8 inches apart.
- Water after planting and mulch lightly.

Quick Bulb Planting Guide

Bulb	Depth	Spacing	Notes
Crocus	3–4 in.	2–3 in.	Earliest spring blooms
Tulips	6–8 in.	4–6 in.	Replace if blooms decline
Daffodils	6–8 in.	4–6 in.	Long-lasting, naturalizes
Hyacinths	6 in.	4–6 in.	Fragrant clusters
Garlic	1–2 in.	4–8 in.	Plant the largest cloves

8. Watch for Fungus on Evergreens

Junipers and arborvitae are vulnerable to tip blight and other fungal diseases.

- Look for browning at branch tips.
- Spray with copper fungicide + spreader-sticker in October.
- Repeat in November.
- Prune infected areas and thin dense growth to improve airflow.
- Keep plants strong with proper watering and mulching.

Quick Fungus Prevention Guide

Step	What to Do	When
Identify	Watch for browning tips	Fall
Spray	Copper + spreader-sticker	October
Repeat	Reapply copper	November
Prune	Remove infected wood	As needed
Airflow	Thin dense growth	Fall
Support	Water & mulch	Before freeze

9. Improve Soil with Sulfur

Alkaline soils can lock up nutrients. Applying sulfur in fall lets it work slowly over winter.

- Lowers soil pH to improve nutrient uptake.
- Helps acid-loving plants like rhododendrons and blueberries.
- Suppresses salt grass in lawns.
- Apply evenly, water in well, and retest soil in spring.

Quick Soil Sulfur Guide

Where	Why	How
Lawns	Greener turf, better nutrient use	Broadcast & water in
Garden Beds	Boosts veggies & flowers	Mix into topsoil
Shrubs/Perennials	Healthier roots & blooms	Spread at drip line
Acid-lovers	Proper acidity	Target near roots
Salt grass	Suppression	Apply to patches

10. Start Composting

Turn fall debris into rich compost for spring.

- Compost browns (leaves, straw, shredded paper) and greens (clippings, scraps, manure).
- Avoid diseased plants, weeds with seeds, and meats or dairy.
- Keep pile ~3–4 ft for heat; turn weekly.
- Moisture should feel like a wrung-out sponge.
- Build or buy a bin for airflow and easy use.

Quick Composting Guide

Category	What to Include	Avoid	Tips
Browns	Leaves, straw, paper	Glossy paper	Balance with greens
Greens	Clippings, scraps, manure	Meat, dairy, oils	Mix in well
Pile Size	3–4 ft	Too small	Bigger heats faster
Moisture	Damp sponge	Too dry/soggy	Adjust with water/browns
Turning	Weekly	Neglect = slow	Adds air, speeds up
Finish	1–2 months	N/A	Ready when dark & crumbly



Wrapping Up

October is a month of transition — from the blaze of fall color to the quiet preparation for winter. By harvesting, planting, protecting, and nourishing your garden now, you're not just closing out the season — you're setting the stage for a vibrant, healthy spring.

Take the time this month to appreciate the beauty of fall and provide your landscape with the care it needs to thrive in the seasons ahead.