

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Back to work!



Marigolds, sweet potato plant, coleus, and verbena are perfect in the autumn yard.

Photos Cynthia Brian



Bring the tropics to your landscape with New Guinea impatiens, red-hot poker, and palms.

By Cynthia Brian

"Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall." – F. Scott Fitzgerald

The recent Pacific Gas and Electric Company Public Safety Power Shutoff due to high gusty winds and dry conditions didn't make me happy because if there is no electricity, there is no internet connection on my computer. Without an internet connection, I can't submit my articles and photographs to the newspaper. I'm not one to use my cell phone for my writing or photography assignments, thus, this announcement meant that I had to stop my autumnal garden cleanup to write and publish.

The silver lining to potential future shutoffs is that you, my dear readers, will get a jumpstart on your fall chores. Yes, it is time to get back to work in your yard.

The next 30 days are the optimal time to get your landscape prepared for the winter sleep and the spring awakening. Before the rains come, harvest your grapes, take away the trash, tidy up the vegetable patch, clear away the dead stems. Over-wintering pests and diseases will take refuge in the hideouts of debris left in the garden. Corn

stalks must be cut (use them for Halloween decorations). Pick the ripe apples, figs and Asian pears. Leaves from deciduous and evergreen trees may be raked into the compost pile. Or, if you have space, stack leaves separately to create a rich leaf mold that can be used next season as a valuable ingredient in your potting soil.

Most garden projects are best begun in autumn when the soil is still warm with cooler evenings. Create new paths, add a rock garden, terrace a hillside, plant a fern grotto, sow a new lawn. If you have a greenhouse, start bringing frost tender potted plants into the structure. If you don't have a greenhouse, identify plants that need protection and if they are in containers, move them closer to the house, preferably under an awning. For plants growing in your garden that will be susceptible to winter's chill, wrap them in burlap. I am currently covering my bougainvillea and blue flowering Birds of Paradise.

With the change of seasons, our houseplants require a bit of TLC. For all of the smaller, movable plants, bring them outdoors for a final refreshing shower to remove built-up dust. Give

them a deep drink on a warm, but not a hot day, and let them dry in the shade before returning them to the house. For large plants such as fiddle leaf fig or philodendron, take a damp cloth and wipe each leaf, top and bottom, as well as the stems. With shorter days, less intense light, and a different indoor atmosphere, our houseplants may suffer. Make sure to keep the soil evenly moist without being soggy. If you want your Christmas cactus to bloom for the holidays, keep it in a cool room without watering so that it can rest.

Red flag days will be more common through November as winds kick up and the heat of fall keeps the thermometers rising. If you pruned your begonias and roses in the last few weeks, you'll enjoy bountiful flowers until the downpours begin. I am truly enamored with begonias, both the tuberous and the wax leaf or fibrous. In some areas, the wax leaf begonia is an annual but in our warmer Mediterranean climate, they are perennial like their sisters, the tuberous begonias. Don't make the mistake of pulling them out when they die back. Just cut them to the ground to allow them to overwinter and you'll be rewarded with even a fuller plant next blooming season.