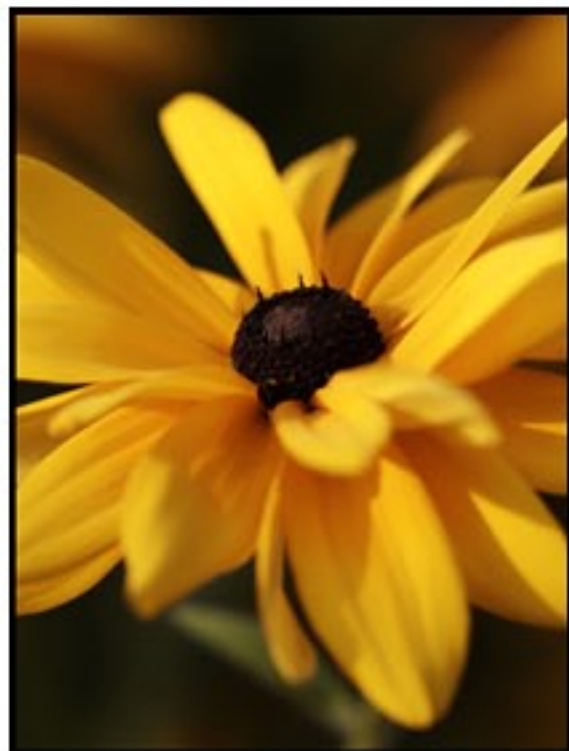


Fall Planting and Eco-gardens

What is an eco-garden? Definitions vary, but most naturalists agree that an eco-garden incorporates ecologically sound gardening techniques, supports and encourages wildlife, protects streams and fish, and protects the global environment.



In many eco-gardens, a portion of the land is used to create an edible landscape, combining the needs of people and wildlife that does more than beautify.

Homeowners can emphasize one or several of these elements, through the deliberate planting of diverse and harmonious vegetables, bushes, plants and trees.

Throughout much of the country, fall is the ideal time to plant both deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, perennials and turf grasses, among other things. Yet, strangely, when it comes to planting, many homeowners think only of spring.



Fall officially begins with the autumn equinox in late September. However, fall weather varies considerably from one part of the country to the next. Essentially, the ideal period for fall planting is roughly six weeks before the first hard frost.

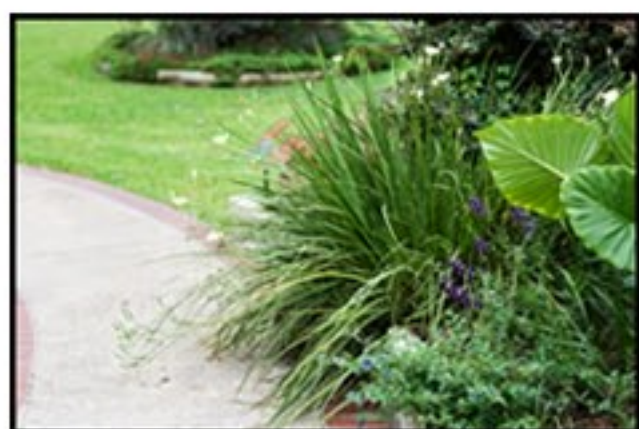
So why is fall planting so good for plants? In the fall, the warm soil encourages root growth. In early spring, roots continue to develop at a faster rate. While the same plant, tree, or shrub planted in spring gets a slow start due to cool soils, those planted in the fall are already well established. Hence, plants introduced in the spring trail behind. When summer arrives, the fall

plantings deal with heat and drought far better than spring plantings, due to their well-established root systems.

Certainly, there are many other good reasons to plant in the fall -- such as cooler temperatures, and fewer pest and disease problems. In addition, many plants are on sale at home improvement stores and nurseries, which makes fall planting good for you, too.

What are some of the elements that can be found in an eco-garden? These gardens usually include:

- ✓ Vegetables, herbs, berries and fruits;
- ✓ Wildlife thickets, woodlands and native plants;
- ✓ Pleasing perennials, annuals and shrubs.



When created with planning and care, an eco-garden promotes harmony between gardens and plants and the living creatures that dwell in and around them.

What are some tips for planning an eco-garden? Native plants and trees are always encouraged when it's time to look at landscaping in an ecologically responsible way. Native plants are the bushes, shrubs and trees that are historically local to an area, before the land was developed. Native plants are native because over time, they have adapted and thrive in the climate and water conditions of a particular geographic area. Native plants include plants with berries, fruit and flowers.



Abundant information regarding native plants exists on websites, at libraries, and landscape and garden centers. Incorporating these plants will mean less water and weeding, and ensure a lush landscape.

Another concept is planting in layers from the ground up. Planting starts at the soil base with ground cover and flowers, and goes up in steps with bushes and then trees. This method of planting protects the landscape and mimics what is found in forests.

When planting, keep pesticides at a minimum, or avoid them if at all possible. Organic fertilizers guarantee minimum percentages of nitrogen, phosphate and potash and include fertilizers made from plant and animal by-products, rock powders and seaweed.