

November 2017
Pickaway to Garden
The Witch of November

By Paul J. Hang

No, not that witch, that was last month. This witch is scarier. The Witch of November is a term some weathermen have used to describe the winds of November. November is the most feared month for shipwrecks on the Great Lakes due to seasonal weather changes. Cold northern air begins to blow down from Canada picking up moisture from the relatively warm waters of the Great Lakes. Most famously, the Edmund Fitzgerald was sunk in November of 1975 in Lake Superior.

Gardeners don't have as much to fear as mariners on the Great Lakes but we do need to be aware and prepare for the winds of November and those of the next few months. Winter winds can dry out plants. Desiccate them. Strong winds can blow over newly planted trees and injure roses and other shrubs by whipping around their canes and stems. Whether or not to stake a tree or shrub, whether or not to protect trees or shrubs from drying winds or snow or ice loads depends on the plant, the site, and the weather. Research is required and well worth it if you have invested a large amount of money and/or labor in your plantings. The answer my friend is not, as Bob Dylan sang, "blowin' in the wind."

The wind is not all bad. It will blow the newly fallen leaves into eddies and out of the way places where various insects and small invertebrates (and some vertebrates) will spend the winter. Wind will blow the standing stalks of grasses and other plants creating swaying waves of winter interest. The sound of the wind through the pines and other trees can be a soothing lullaby when dropping off to sleep.

Wind in November can be the reminder that winter is coming. It, as the month itself, helps to transition from fall to winter. The wind, the dark, the cold, the gloom and (yes it's possible) the snow, all get us ready for what is coming. Is your garden ready? Are you ready?

TREE LOVERS, or huggers, there is a newly created Tree Commission for the city instituted to protect and encourage the growth of our urban forest. If you are interested in serving on this commission you can apply at: <http://www.ci.circleville.oh.us/DocumentCenter/View/133>.

October 2017
Pickaway to Garden
Tree Manna

By Paul J. Hang

Now that fall has arrived we can anticipate the annual avalanche of falling leaves. Some of my crabapples have already lost most of their leaves as they are want to do. My river birch has been

dropping its leaves, and a mist of goo, for the last couple weeks. After the coming, and hoped for, display of fall color, the maples, oaks, and other deciduous trees will sever the leaves that enabled them to make their own food and send them fluttering to the ground. The discarded leaves are waste that in the natural world are left on the forest floor as fertilizer and mulch for the trees that grew them. Thus, I could have titled this column Tree Manure. But on the advice of others more discreet, sensitive and less iconoclastic than I, I have demurred.

Tree Manna sounds more elegant. Manna, sustenance, miraculous, a gift, falling leaves fulfill every definition of manna except unexpected. Falling leaves in October are certainly not unexpected, but perhaps their worth is. Manna does capture another way of viewing the autumnal gift of trees. Tree Manna is dropping, such as fruits (persimmons and paw paws), acorns and other nuts (but not the political variety) and most importantly, leaves.

When gathering this manna by raking, mowing or blowing, it might be difficult to view them as a gift. But even a windfall must be collected. Leaves are organic; they contain valuable attributes and nutrients. As mulch or soil amendment they can't be beat. Leaves can be collected and heaped up to rot or placed in a compost pile. Shredding them will speed up decomposition. They can also be shredded and left on the lawn, or put directly onto the garden and incorporated into the soil. The best thing you can do for clay or sandy soils is to add organic matter.

Leaves also sequester carbon. In the old days we released the carbon back into the atmosphere by burning them. Gathering them for other uses keeps that carbon tied up and does not contribute to climate change. Of course the smell of burning leaves is one of the triggers of nostalgia. As Hal Borland said in his Twelve Moons of the Year, "If you are middle aged, don't allow yourself to smell it or you will wonder what happened to those years."

Finally, fall is the best time to plant trees. Think ahead and plan for future manure, I mean manna, from your trees. Make the hole wide and shallow. Plant the tree with the trunk flare at or slightly above the ground level. Plant trees well away from buildings, no tall growing trees under power lines and not too close to each other. And water your trees, even during the winter.

Things to do in the garden:

Hot caps and covers should be made handy in case a frost or freeze is forecast. Remember that the coldest temperature usually comes a little after sunrise. The earth radiates heat away and the sun hasn't climbed high enough to begin heating us. You might still save some plants even if you slept in after it became light. If you can protect your plants a couple more weeks of warmth is likely to follow.

Consider bringing in the houseplants that you put outside this summer if you haven't already. Make sure you don't bring in any bugs with them; a good blast of water from your hose can wash most of them off. Bring the pots into a sheltered spot for a week or so to help the plants acclimate before shocking them with the warmer temperatures of your home.

In October, and even into early November, plant garlic and shallots. Cloves from store bought garlic may not work as some are treated to delay sprouting. You can also order favorite varieties

from seed catalogs. Separate the cloves and plant 4 inches apart. Harvest garlic around the 4th of July.

Dig up your tender corms and bulbs as soon as they are frostbitten. Dahlias, glads, tuberous begonias and cannas should be dug and stored in a cool dry place. Most basements are too warm. Caladiums, on the other hand, should be stored at 65 - 70 degrees. Go to ohioline.osu.edu and bring up Factsheet HYG-1244-92 to get specific information on storing Summer Flowering Bulbs.

You can still divide day lilies and iris. Cut back the iris leaves to four-inch fans. Stop feeding your roses but don't stop giving them water. Consider cutting back your roses halfway if they stop blooming. If you have dormant roses you can still plant them. Spring bulbs can be planted as soon as you get them. Plant them at a depth three times their length; place some bulb food in the hole with them. For a better display plant them in groups, not single file.

If you planted trees this year protect the trunks from gnawing rabbits and other varmints with hardware cloth or the plastic wrap made for this purpose. Even older trees can benefit from this if you've experienced this damage in the past.

If you don't accumulate a lot of leaves consider just shredding them with the mower and leave them scattered on the lawn. Otherwise, compost them. It is still the best time to fertilize your lawn. Use a high nitrogen soluble product. You can still sow grass seed.

Leave seed heads for the birds. Also leave stems for overwintering good insects. You can put off most cleanup (but not in the vegetable garden) until next spring! Add mulch around perennials after the ground freezes.

September 2017

Pickaway to Garden Meet and Tomatoes

By Paul Hang

That sounds like the tried and true traditional diet of a lot of us Americans, whether we are Irish or not. Tomatoes can often be the means of meeting people. Offering a few tomatoes to a neighbor, taking your overproduction to a food bank, sharing them with the group at church or an organization you belong to can be a way of meeting people we might not otherwise talk with. This reminds me of an ad on TV where the voice says "I used to think my father gave away the food he grew because he grew too much. Now I realize he grew too much so he could give it away." Leaving zucchinis the size of a 7lb. infant on the doorsteps of strangers in the middle of the night doesn't accomplish the same thing. There is something about giving away food that speaks to our desire to nurture others. It just feels good.

Other acquaintances you might meet with this month, while cruising your landscape, are the large orb spiders, the Black and Yellow Garden Spider and the Banded Garden Spider. Many spiders are reaching maturity this time of year and are at their largest size. These spiders are

harmless and can be beneficial to the garden. However they can startle the unprepared and trigger an acute case of arachnophobia. You may also come across bagworm bags festooning your shrubs or trees. Pull, or better yet, cut them off. Treat them to the bagworm two step and then throw them in the trash. Pesticides are of no benefit at this stage. For every bag you eliminate you are keeping hundreds of bagworms from defoliating your trees and shrubs next spring.

Did your tomato plants meet with misfortune this season? Early blight, where the leaves turn brown and fall off, has been troublesome. It is a disease which doesn't affect the fruit but does shorten the season. Sanitation is the key. When done, put the plants in the trash along with the leaf debris. Don't plant tomatoes in that spot for at least three years.

Although color is fast disappearing with the blooms of our flowering plants, more color is coming. Tomato red sumac is the first to change followed by Virginia creeper, the maples and then the other trees and shrubs in quick succession. Enjoy those cool sunny days of September that are sure to come.

Don't give up on the garden or the yard. In many ways this is the best time to prepare them for next year and there is still time to plant more vegetables and flowering plants. Check out the "Things to do in the garden," and decide which apply to you and to your "to do" obligations. Gardening should be fun even if it also requires work.

Things to do in the garden:

As plants "give up the ghost" remove them from the garden. If they are annuals pull them up, if perennials cut them off unless you want their winter interest. Dispose of the debris in a "hot" compost heap, bury them or put them in the trash. In the butterfly garden you will surely want to leave the host plants as they are harboring the overwintering eggs and larvae of next year's butterflies. Those plants that you don't want to re-seed by all means remove the seed heads before their seeds are scattered. Or, leave them for the birds. Clean up old fruit from around fruit trees.

Collect, dry, and store seeds for next year. Use only heirloom varieties, hybrids will not grow true. Harvest and cure winter squash and gourds if they are ready. Leave a two inch stem. Gourds should be finished with growth before you cut them from the vine, store indoors at 60 degrees.

September is the best time to plant grass seed whether you are re-seeding, patching or establishing a new lawn. If you only fertilize your lawn once a year, or if you have never fertilized it, fall is also the best time to do it. Cooler, wetter (usually) fall weather promotes good root growth and your grass will start out next spring healthier and ready for more vigorous growth. Want to really get your lawn in shape? Fertilize in September and then again around Thanksgiving. Labor Day and Veterans' Day are easy to remember. Read directions for amounts.

In those areas that are not to be fall planted, plant a cover crop or "green manure" that will be turned in in the spring. Buckwheat, annual rye, sweet clover, winter barley, wheat, soybeans, alfalfa, and hairy vetch make good green manures.

Now is the time to plant spring flowering bulbs. A good rule of thumb is to plant bulbs at a depth about three times the height of the bulb. Planting irises and peonies this fall takes advantage of the warm earth. They should be planted about 2 inches deep. If your peonies haven't bloomed well because of shade from nearby competing trees, now is a good time to move them to a sunnier place in the yard.

Watch for yellowing of gladiolus leaves. Dig the corms and hang until the tops turn brown. Then store in a cool, not freezing, well ventilated basement or garage. Do the same with caladium, cannas, and dahlias when their tops turn brown. Fall is a good time to divide Lily of the Valley, primroses, peonies, day lilies, coral-bells and bleeding heart. Adding bulb food and humus will be rewarded in the spring.

You can plant onion seed now for early green onions and bulbs. Yes, onions are bulbs. You can still plant cool season vegetables. It's not too late to start beets, carrots, kale and lettuce, maybe even bush beans! If you have row covers, or can make them, you can have these for Thanksgiving dinner. Of course this assumes we don't have a hard freeze and if we do you are prepared to cover the plants if it happens. If the ground temperature stays above 50 roots continue to grow. Order garlic bulbs now for planting later.

Now is a good time to test your soil. The called for amendments will have time to work their way into the soil and be available to the plants for the next growing season. Information on soil testing is available at the OSU Extension Office 474-7534.

August 2017

Pickaway to Garden

Confusion?

By Paul J. Hang

Collusion, illusion, delusion? Conclusion, confusion. As a purveyor and a consumer of gardening advice I try to avoid confusion. But sometimes it is unavoidable. As an example, I have heard it said "See bug, spray bug." Now as a general rule it means don't spray until you see a bug (I am using bug in its usual sense not in its entomological meaning). No bugs, no need to spray. It doesn't mean that if you see a bug you should spray it. There are good bugs and bad bugs when it comes to gardening. We don't want to spray good bugs; they are going to eliminate the bad ones. Pesticides do not discriminate between good bugs and bad bugs. How do we tell if they are good bugs? It can be confusing.

Here are some general rules with which I want to bug you. Bad bugs (plant eaters or vectors of disease) usually occur in groups. Think a flock of sheep. Good bugs are predators and actively stalk bad bugs. Think a wolf. Good bugs are usually fast, running around looking for bad bugs that are casually munching on our plants. This is not always the case. Not all good bugs run around, some hide and wait for bad bugs to walk or fly by and then they pounce. Some good bugs set traps or webs, think spiders. Some bugs are more beneficial in their larval stage than when adults, think lady beetles. Certain wasps insert their eggs into worms or larvae and those

eggs hatch and eat the host from the inside out. They are called parasitoids. They kill their hosts. (I didn't say this would be pretty, confusing yes.)

If you see bad bugs (aphids, some caterpillars, some mites, scale, etc.) wait to see if good bugs show up for the feast. If we spray all the bad bugs no good bugs will be around (if not killed by the spray there will be nothing for them to eat). This is the premise of organic gardening, take care of the good bugs and they will take care of the bad ones. Bees are good bugs, spraying when plants are in flower will kill the bees. Also planting more native plants will attract more predators. Caterpillars of course will turn into butterflies and moths most of which are good bugs. It depends on what plants they appear whether we try to eliminate them or not. Cabbage white butterfly caterpillars on my cabbage and broccoli or tomato hornworms on my tomatoes I don't tolerate. Caterpillars of butterflies on their host plants I do tolerate such as monarch caterpillars on milkweed.

The good bugs are arthropods. Within that phylum good bugs are in three classes, insects (beetles, flies, mantids, true bugs, lacewings, ants and wasps) arachnids (spiders, mites and others) and centipedes. Who knew there are predatory stink bugs and mites? Maybe it's more complicated than confusing. For more information find "Good Garden Bugs" by OSU professor Mary M. Gardiner PH.D. ,Quarry Books. Also, go to www.bugguide.net hosted by Iowa State University and www.caterpillarlab.org there you will find pictures and more.

Remember 97 percent of insects are either good or neutral for our gardens and landscape.

August is Tree Check month. Pay attention to your trees. They are valuable assets to your property and to our community. Fall is the best time to plant trees. Consider planting a shade tree. For advice on what trees to plant and where to plant them, go to www.arboday.org. To gain an appreciation of our oldest living things see www.treesintrouble.com.

Things to do in the garden:

Weed. Weed. Weed and maybe water if we don't get at least an inch of rain each week. Pull all that crabgrass before it goes to seed. Take heart though, the first good frost will kill it. Plant the seeds of green beans, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage early in the month, carrots, lettuces, spinach, radishes, turnips, and kale mid-month, for a fall garden.

As plants die back clean up the debris so bad insects and disease don't have a place to overwinter. This is particularly important for corn, beans, cucumbers and bush squash plants after they cease bearing, some landscape plants you may want to leave alone for seeds for wintering birds and for visual winter interest such as coneflowers and native ornamental grasses.

Want to have a new garden next year? Now is a good time to prepare the site. Cover the area with black plastic, thick cover of newspaper or cardboard weighted down or even old carpet. Anything that will block the sun will leave bare earth come spring. If you are in a hurry you can use an herbicide containing glyphosate.

Disbud your dahlias for bigger blooms and fertilize. Side dress (fertilize) peonies with a balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 12-12-12.

By the end of the month consider disbudding your tomato plants. Remove the growing tips of each branch and pinch out all the blossoms that bloom. It takes six weeks from blossom to fruit. This practice will give bigger tomatoes and prevent all those marble size tomatoes that the frost gets and never reach the table. If you're not sure about this, try it on some of your plants and compare to those that you leave alone. Experiment! Try this also with melons and winter squash.

Tomatoes not ripening? Be patient, the plants are still growing and putting down roots not just ripening the fruit that has already set. Pick tomatoes before they are completely ripe. They will ripen off the vine if they still show a blush of green. Totally ripe tomatoes still on the vine can burst with a glut of water from rain or the hose. They can be sampled by birds and mammals. Follow this advice and you will enjoy better tomatoes.

This is a good time to look at plants at their full maturity. Assess their look, their height, their spread, their color and texture. Do you like where they are? If not, think about moving them as soon as they begin to go dormant. If they are annuals, make a note for next year to plant them in another spot in the garden. If all your perennials have stopped blooming plant some late blooming ones for next year such as black-eyed Susan, coreopsis, liatris and mallow. It is time to plant biennials and order bulbs for fall planting for blooms next year. Now is a good time to divide overgrown perennials and to plant container grown ones.