What a beautiful Fall!

Joyce Wilcox, MN River Valley Master Gardener

Many home owners have yet to rake the leaves from this long warm season. Tough to shake those large trees that are still unwilling to release their leaves!! Several yard and garden tasks need some attention yet this fall to assure a healthy yard and garden next year. Healthy lawns can tolerate a minimal amount of leaves over the winter. In fact, a light cover of dry leaves can aid in returning valuable nutrients to the soil. A quick "run over" with a lawn mower can chop up the leaves and aid the decomposition process. Problems occur if a thick mat of leaves is left on the lawn over winter. Grass can be smothered or mold under a dense cover of leaves. Black walnut leaves and nuts are an exception. Even a few walnuts and/or leaves can damage next year's lawn. A thorough clean-up is recommended. Because the fall has been unseasonably warm many yards are still green. A final "high" mowing would be a good idea. Long grass can become matted and promote disease like mold if the winter brings a heavy snow cover.

Perennial flower beds would benefit from good fall clean up. Many local gardeners reported problems with powdery mildew on peonies. A good way to keep this disease under control is to remove the spent stems and leaves and clean up the area surrounding the plants. Do not compost diseased leaves or stems. This disease overwinters in dead plant debris.

Mums are a perennial that benefit from a Fall leaf mulch. The stems should be cut back to 3-4 inches and a clean, fluffy cover of leaves will aid in winter survival. Maple leaves are a very good choice. They are usually large and stay fluffy. Plants should not be mulched until the ground freezes. The purpose of the mulch is to protect the plants from the "freeze/thaw" cycle that can occur as early as February. Mulching too early can actually smother the plants.

If you are a vegetable gardener now would be a good time to make some notes for next spring. Make a quick map of the location of plants in this year's garden. Crop rotation is a key in promoting a healthy garden for next year. Vegetables in the "night shade" family-tomatoes, peppers, potatoes must be rotated to avoid disease problems next year.

A final word about overwintering annuals or flowering baskets from this season in the house. Always isolate plants for several weeks and treat with an insecticidal soap before introducing them into your indoor plant family. Aphids and other creatures are usually unwelcomed guests in your household. They will take any opportunity to "join the family".

It's always tough to bid another growing season farewell. Take heart! The seed catalogs will be in the mail come December!!
The Last Green Leaves in the Fall

You may notice some greenery in the woods, fencerow, or on the edge....Doesn't look quite right for November, does it? There's a very good chance that what you're seeing is Common Buckthorn (Rhamnus cathartica). This widespread, woody understory shrub/tree is a non-native species which was originally introduced to North America as an ornamental; it was used as a living fence and for wildlife habitat. It escaped domesticity and has aggressively spread across the upper Midwest.

Common buckthorn thrives in a variety of landscapes, crowds out and displaces native understories, and prevents natural regeneration of forest species. It is also a threat to agricultural producers because it can serve as an alternate host for alfalfa mosaic virus, oat crown rust, and soybean aphid. Common buckthorn has distinctive characteristics to distinguish it from native understory shrubs and trees. Plants are either male or female, and only female plants produce fruit. The plants produce small round berries in clusters, and the berries are shiny black. Birds consume the fruit and spread the seed.

Common buckthorn plants can reach a height of 20 feet and can be single or multi-stemmed. The leaves are oval, smooth, glossy, and have distinctive veins that radiate outward from a central mid-vein. The leaves stay green late into the fall after most other trees and shrubs have dropped their leaves, making fall a good time of year to identify the plant. It also has small sharp thorns at the ends of the branches.

Common buckthorn and all cultivars are restricted from being transported, sold, or intentionally propagated in Minnesota. It is recommended that this species be prevented from spreading to new areas and that smaller populations be eradicated. Because common buckthorn produces abundant fruit that is attractive to birds and is an aggressive competitor, prevention and management can be challenging:

- On smaller infestations, pulling the plants out by the roots can be effective. Make sure to reduce soil disturbance to prevent new buckthorn seedlings from emerging.

- Foliar and cut-stem herbicide applications can also be effective. Repeated treatments over several growing seasons may be necessary.

Click here for more buckthorn information:
http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/shrubs/common-buckthorn-identification/

http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/weeds/buckthorn-control/

https://www.mda.state.mn.us/plants/pestmanagement/weedcontrol/noxiouslist/commonbuckthorn.aspx
-from MDA Plant Pest Insider

2016 Master Gardener Calendars Here!
The 2016 calendar is available at the UM Blue Earth County Extension office.

Calendars are available for $12 each and at a reduced rate for Extension Master Gardeners. ($8)

They are a terrific gift that continues to delight throughout the year.

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