



November 11, 2011

Tying up ends for the winter

I just know I was not alone in being taken unawares by last weekend's storm. It was such a mad scramble to complete most of the pending chores that Saturday morning.

Thankfully my vast quantity of bulbs had been planted the weekend before. I heard from several gardeners who planted their bulbs in the snow! The huge amount of tree limbs and whole trees themselves that lay scattered in the aftermath is a mess that must be dealt with in short order. This could very well be the first of other storms to follow. For all our sakes, I hope not. My greenhouse narrowly escaped being hit but it was a bit dicey for a while as I kept watch through the night as the winds raged. I hope nobody came to any harm and by now all power and reasonable order has been restored. Lets just be there for each other as we brace ourselves for the winter.

The upside of the sudden storm is that I'm well ahead on the to-do list (see below). But it was done with such urgency that I had no time to observe the season as I usually do. So many trees had not as yet shed their leaves so the snow made the load particularly heavy and hence succumbed to the pressure. That was heartbreaking. And thus ended our autumn. But there will be next year and the gardener's incorrigible optimism will get one there.

So, if you hadn't been able to address the garden chores, don't despair. Just get to them as soon as you can and don't blame yourself about anything that suffered last weekend. These things happen. Nature keeps us humble but she also gives us many chances to do it over and better.

Things To Do This Month

1. Take down all Halloween decorations. Search for and remove candy wrappers and other such debris.
2. Pot up fall displays for the season. Despite the weather, it is still fall! Combinations of ornamental kale and cabbage with asters look quite fetching. As do assortments of pumpkins and gourds spilling out of window boxes and urns.
3. Cut back all plants except those that are needed for winter interest.
4. Clean up beds. Mulch well.
5. Secure limbs of climbing roses and other vines.
6. Remove all dead wood from shrubs and trees.
7. Rake leaves.
8. Finish planting the bulbs for spring. Refrigerate those that will be forced indoors. Calculate the appropriate number of weeks such cooling is required for the specific types of bulbs and mark the date on calendar. That way you'll be reminded to start the forcing on time.
9. If you haven't already brought in all tender plants that need to be wintered over, do so without further delay.
10. If dahlias are not as yet lifted up, don't waste any more time. Finish this task right away. Brush off soil from the tubers and store in a cool, dry place.
11. Clean and put away all outdoor furniture and accoutrement.
12. Empty, wash and dry planters. Store till next spring.
13. Clean and dry garden stakes and various tools. Put away so they are handy for next season's use.
14. Empty all water hoses and shut off water to outdoor faucets. Store the hoses in a frost free area.
15. Make note of required repairs in fences, paths, patios etc., Either get them attended to before the snow and ice or schedule now for the spring. These things have a way of being neglected till the problem is bigger and more costly.
16. Protect outdoor statuary and pots that are too big/heavy to move by wrapping with plastic and then burlap. The burlap is to make it look more aesthetically pleasing. Otherwise just plastic will do.
17. Protect vulnerable plants such as boxwood and roses by surrounding with burlap. This barrier works as a windbreak. The space between the burlap and roses should be filled with dry leaves to provide insulation. I do this only after it gets really cold by which time rodents have already found other homes. Otherwise, they will get cozy under the layers of leaves and possibly harm the plants as they settle in for the winter.

Autumn Flames

Long nights bring dark fears
Lonely thoughts harbor easy tears
Sensing change, trees ablaze
Scattering flames to clear the haze
Trying hard to prolong light
While winter days are in sight
Embers turn to quiet ash
Sparks are gone in a flash.