



AUTUMN CHORES

In the midst of fall's beauty, preparations are under way for next year's displays.

John Emmanuel

AT WAVE HILL the garden is in its final glory, with brilliant colors from woody plants like the cutleaf sumac (*Rhus typhina* 'Dissecta'), which burns with intensity in the Wild Garden, and the sugar maples throughout the garden echoing the collective hues of the great northeastern woods. Standing under the pergola on the main lawn, one can still look across the Hudson River to the Palisades ablaze in orange and red. Wave Hill is no longer a festive island of color and texture in a sea of suburban summer greenery, but part of a great extravaganza of fall colors.

Aside from a little staking here and there, we are no longer

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needed to manage the year's floral alchemy. With the first leaves falling, it's time to prepare for next year, and there is much to do before the first killing frosts. Armed with paper bags and pencils to note names, dates, and locations, we collect the seeds of favorite annuals. We take cuttings of tender perennials, such as the salvias, senecios, lavenders, centaureas, and helichrysums. The earlier the cuttings are taken, the better their chances of getting well established in pots before the short days of

December slow growth to a crawl. Cuttings that haven't rooted by the ebb of year often will not root at all.

Each year one or two sections of a bed are designated for

PLANTING SPRING BULBS

Now we realize the value of the notes taken during the hectic days of spring. A few words jotted down then, can jog the memory. "Tulipa pulchella will look great on that knoll above the path where the setting sun will set the violet bowls aflame at eye level!"

NEVER TOO MANY LEAVES

Every year at this time, piles or bags of leaves line the curbs. We set out in trucks and collect as many bags as we can, filling our smallest mulch pile to a great height, and supplementing our larger pile with leaves from a local landscapers. Not only are they valuable

for spring and summer bed coverage but now, as cover for bulbs and tubers. Bags of leaves are also packed around the balled-and-burlapped shrubs and trees that are stored in the garage. The point is not to keep hardy plants warm but to keep the temperatures as stable as possible.

revitalizing in fall. The perennials are lifted and divided, the bulbs collected into like groups, and everything kept under tarps while compost is added to the soil. (We try to use up the oldest pile of compost before the final cutting back of all the gardens, so that we can start a fresh pile in its place.) After thoroughly compressing the newly enriched soil with our feet, the plants are reset in the border.

In the nursery where we grow the shrubs and trees too small to be planted out, or those we know little about and need time to know, we start tagging the plants that are ready for ball-and-burlapping. Many of them are transplanted directly to new homes on the grounds; others are set in big plastic containers insulated with dry leaves and stored in a protected area outside until the following spring when they will be planted. Sometimes a tender perennial is dug from the garden and stored in one of the holding

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areas, despite the shortage of space, just in case cuttings of the plants do not root or if we want to have a larger specimen for next year.

Before their leaves yellow and disappear, the tender bulbs like crocosmias, acidantheras, and gloriosa lilies are dug and placed in containers to dry out. Once their tops yellow, we cut off the withered leaves and pack the bulbs and tubers in peat or dry shredded leaves for storage. And just when we think we are done with bulbs, the spring bulbs that

we ordered in late summer arrive and must be planted before the ground freezes.

The hoop house must now be prepared in order to provide winter storage. A large roll of six-mil plastic measuring 40 feet by 100 feet is set up on the roof of the potting shed on an ad hoc roller. Then the plastic is stretched out over the hoop house frame and nailed to strips of lathe wood, which hold



the plastic in place. The plants that have spent the summer on the back terrace or out by the pergola or in the flower garden are hauled back to the work areas around the garage and potting shed. The pachypodiums and the agaves go back to the cactus and succulent house. Tropical plants like aloccasias, brugmansias, and ficus, which have been bedded out for the summer, are dug and brought back to the potting shed where they are potted for the winter. Meanwhile, plants already in pots, such as the *Phormium tenax*, the osmanthus and pittosporums are stored in the garage, along with oleanders and myrtles, and a great many other hardy plants needing protection from winter winds and sun burn. All these plants will be kept nearly dormant until spring.

The leaves are dropping like confetti. We rake them up and store them in a small mulch pile opposite the nursery. Some local landscapers bring in truckloads of shredded leaves and dump them in another, much larger mulch pile that we will use next season on the grounds and in the woodlands.

In the Monocot and Wild Gardens we are cutting down the grasses and shredding them, leaving only a few for winter interest. We also cut back the massive and unwieldy leaves of the banana *Musa zebrina*. It is then dug, packed in dry leaves, and stored in a very dry dark place. The hardy banana *Musa basjoo* (USDA Zone 7), is cut back and mulched heavily.

Once a good frost brings down the cannas and crinum, they are dug and packed in mulch in giant plastic containers and tagged so we'll know who is who next spring. They are stored where the temperature will remain between 40° and 50°F. The dahlias, too, are lifted. When the soil clinging to their tubers is dry, they are wrapped in newspaper, tagged for easy identification, and stored in cardboard boxes in the same area as the cannas.

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We mustn't forget the eucomis, their leaves now nearly gone. In the past, small tubers left behind in the ground have reappeared in the spring, but we are still cowards and dare not leave them all to fate. On the other hand, the alstromerias, which we dug religiously when I started working at Wave Hill 21 years ago, reappear like clockwork without the slightest bit of human protection. Like the alstromerias, the rosemarys in the Dry Garden are left out now, wrapped in fir boughs sometime in late December. To our surprise, *Erythrina crista-galli*, also in the Dry Garden, has made it through recent winters, sustained by the heat captured in the surrounding pavement.

With temperatures now falling into the low 30s at night, we are lifting the last of the tender perennials. The half wine barrel of *Phyllostachys nigra* is brought down from the Monocot Garden and stored against the frame-yard wall, mulched with bags of newly collected leaves. The three *Yucca rostrata* are moved from the terrace behind the Wave Hill house into the garage where they will stay, dry,

until next spring.

Nights of frost become a regularity by mid-November. To protect the most sensitive alpiners from excess rain as well as from extreme cold, the translucent plastic panels are installed on the roof of the Alpine House. And at night we hang the windows, too, although these are removed on sunny days—even sunny winter days—to prevent heat buildup. In the greenhouse, the furnace is checked and the temperature alarms inspected. Seen from the warm, moisture-laden tropical house, where an equatorial world of greenery reigns, the great copper beech growing just west of the greenhouses stands bare and majestic. Out there the party is over. A far cry from those outdoor revelries, the final festivities of the year will be celebrated inside. ♡

COMPOST

Our compost piles are nothing more than the name implies: piles. We don't layer the pile, but simply heap the material on; nor do we turn it over often—no more than once or twice a year. But when it comes to composting the grasses, shredding is necessary; otherwise the tough stems will mire pitch forks. Anyone desiring a compost pile should

not worry about technique. Just start.

FAVORITE FALL SHRUBS

Cotoneaster henryanus: lanky limbs all akimbo bearing brilliant red leaves. It is a wonderful understory plant.

Hippophae rhamnoides: not an easy plant to caress with its thorns, but with its silver leaves and fantastic orange yellow berries it is an unbeatable presence in fall and winter.

Callicarpa bodinieri 'Profusion': leaves yellowing around purple-lavender berries that stand out with pointillistic precision at a distance.

Fothergilla gardenii: leaves of brilliant oranges of differing hues, all hung on a 5-foot, manageable shrub that would look great anywhere but is especially nice against the purple blossoms of *Salvia leucantha*.