Preparing to Move Plants Inside
By Eloise Adams

If your houseplants spent the summer outside basking in the high humidity and temperatures, which satisfies their origins, it is a shock to their systems when the nighttime temperatures dip into the 50s. Now is the time to move the plants to a shaded location for several days to acclimatize them to the darker conditions they will experience inside. Don't wait too long to take them inside because this could force them to adjust too quickly to a heated environment.

Plants need to be examined carefully for pests: on the plant, on the container and in the soil. If you do find insects you can try to hose them off and if that doesn't work, use insecticidal soap. If the soil has fungus gnats you can use a light application of liquid Sevin. Be sure to check the bottom of the container for snails, slugs and sow bugs. Also, you can soak the root ball in a tub of soapy water for about 20 minutes for pests hidden in the soil. Be sure to drain well before moving the plant inside.

If the plant has overgrown it’s inside location, do the pruning outside. Some plants ooze a milky, sticky liquid when cut, especially those in the Ficus family. Most houseplants do not require winter fertilization, for this is the dormant period.

Place the plant in the brightest light available when you bring it inside. After all, it has enjoyed dappled sunlight and fresh air all summer. Plants are categorized into low, medium and high light requirements. They will not flourish if light requirements are not met. Do not be alarmed if a few leaves turn yellow and die. This loss of foliage is a survival mechanism; plants going through an adjustment to a new environment drop the older, lower leaves they cannot support. Ficus benjamina (Weeping Fig) is notorious for dropping leaves anytime it is moved.

Plants make the long hours spent confined indoors a little more pleasant. The most widely grown foliage houseplant is the philodendron but there is a multitude of plants to choose from that do quite well inside. Determine what space and light you have and buy some to enjoy during the winter. Green is the buzzword!

( http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-611.html) and the Southern Living Garden Book, Oxmoor House, Birmingham, January 2004
Featured Plant
*Nyssa sylvatica*
Black tupelo, Blackgum, Pepperidge, Sourgum, and Beetlbung

The black tupelo is a native to Eastern North America. It can be found from the New England states in the North down into Florida and as far west as Eastern Texas. It grows best along the riverbed where the soil is moist but well drained. However it is very adaptable and can also be found growing naturally in well-drained Sandy, Clay Loam. It reaches heights of 60 feet or taller with a spread of 20 to 25 feet.

It is grown as an ornamental for its beautiful, red, fall color and the shiny, dark green leaves in the summer. The flowers in the spring are not very noticeable, but they are interesting.

Black tupelo has a flowering habit that is polygamioecious. Polygamioecious is a big word meaning some plants have mostly male flowers while others have mostly female flowers, with most plants having a few perfect flowers. This would account for some plant being loaded with berries, while others may only have a few berries. As the black berries ripen in the fall the birds devour them.

Upcoming Events

- **Fruit and Nut Tree Sale** – Order forms are now available at the Johnston County office on NC Cooperative Extension. Call 989-5380 or come by the office and pick one up. Orders must be received by November 12, 2010.

- **Plant Clinic** at Clayton Farm and Community Market Saturday, October 16

- **The Arboretum at JCC** has several events coming up in October. There are tours on Wednesday, October 6 and Wednesday, October 20 and a Soap making class on Wednesday, October 13. For more information on these events including the cost and to register call (919) 209-2052 or (919) 209-2184 or visit their website at http://www.johnstoncc.edu/arboretum

Insect Investigator

**Minute Pirate Bug**

Order: HEMIPTERA

The minute pirate bug is one of the tiny predators of the insect world. This true bug is black with white markings and only about 1/5th of an inch long when mature. It only takes three weeks for a minute pirate bug to go from egg to mature adult. The nymphs (immature insects) are yellowish or reddish brown and may be mistaken for chinch bugs in their earliest stage of development.

(Photo by W. Sterling.)

The minute pirate bug overwinters as an adult in leaf litter. It is often one of the first predators to come out in the spring. They feed on some of the most common plant pests including aphids, chinch bugs, springtails, plant bugs, thrips, whiteflies, spider mites and eggs and small larvae of corn earworms.
One drawback to this predator is that late in the summer and early fall they tend to migrate out of the fields and come in contact with humans. The bad part is that they seem to be in a disagreeable mood, much like many people after a hot dry summer, and they bite. The bite is reportedly painful. Different people have different reactions to this bite. For some the bite is nothing more than painful, others receive a red mark and the worst reaction is that the area swells up like a mosquito bite. No venom or saliva is injected into the site.

What’s In Season

*Cucurbita sp.*

Pumpkin

What’s more American than pumpkin pie? Well maybe baseball, football, or apple pie, but pumpkins are native to the Americas and have been around longer than the sports. Pumpkins were one of the things present at that very first Thanksgiving meal with the Native Americans and the settlers.

Pumpkins are easy to grow from seed. Simply bury a seed about one inch in a well-drained soil and keep it moist until the seed begins to poke through. The soil should have a pH between 6.0 and 6.5. It takes about 100 days for pumpkins to go from seed to mature fruit. That’s right a pumpkin is a fruit just like an apple, peach or tomato. If mid-October is the targeted harvest date, planting should take place mid to late June. Pumpkins take a lot of space in the garden and can be used as a ground cover around other plants such as tomatoes and corn.

There are several different varieties to choose from when selecting a pumpkin to grow. The largest of the pumpkins are *Cucurbita maxima* and can weigh over 100 pounds. The world record pumpkin weighed over 1,700 pounds. Most pumpkins used for carving at Halloween are from the *Cucurbita pepo* species. While pumpkins from the species *Cucurbita moschata* are often used for cooking pies and processing.

Pumpkin can be used in several different ways. The early settlers reportedly sliced off the top, removed the seeds, filled the inside with milk, spices and syrup then cooked them slowly over a bed of hot coals. Most parts of the pumpkin fruit are edible, even the seeds. The rind is the only part that is not eaten.

Recipe

**Roasted Pumpkin Seeds**

**Ingredients**
- 2 cups of pumpkin seeds
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 1 quart water
- 1 tablespoon melted butter

**Directions**
- Preheat oven to 250 degrees F
- Pick through seeds, removing any cut seeds.
- Remove as much of the stringy fibers as possible.
- Bring water and salt to a boil. Add seeds and boil for 10 minutes. Drain, spread on paper towel and pat dry.
- Place seeds in a bowl and toss with butter. Spread evenly on a large cookie sheet or roasting pan.
- Place pan in preheated oven and roast for 30 to 40 minutes, until crisp and golden brown.
- Cool seeds, then shell and eat or pack in an airtight container and refrigerate.

**References:**


October Garden Tasks

Fall is for planting! Autumn is an ideal time to plant or transplant deciduous trees/shrubs and perennials. Fall is also a great time to till the soil and add organic material and lime. The bed will have plenty of time to "mellow" before next spring. Turning over the soil also exposes harmful insects and grubs to predators.

GENERAL UPKEEP

• Collect soil samples for testing. Test your lawn, flowerbeds & vegetable garden. Testing should be done every 2-3 years. The kits and analysis are FREE. Strong healthy plants start with proper soil pH and fertility.
• Throw away any diseased plant material. Do not put it in a compost pile. Leaving infected plant material on the plants or on the ground provides a source of inoculum for next years infection.

LAWN CARE

• Pamper newly seeded fescue lawns. Little grass plants have very small, shallow roots. Keep them watered. Don't let falling leaves smother them. Use a leaf blower on low power or rake very gently so you don't uproot the tender young plants.
• If desired, Bermuda lawns may be overseeded with annual rye at a rate of 5 lbs/1000 sq ft.

TREES, SHRUBS & ORNAMENTALS

• Improve your clay soil. Shrubs and perennials can drown and suffocate in sticky clay soils. Loosening the soil and adding well-rotted compost, in a ratio of one part compost to two parts soil, allows plants to grow much better. Mix it well with the soil, making a bed 8-12" deep.
• Use shredded leaves as mulch. Fallen leaves contain lots of nutrients, but they decompose slowly. Help the process along by grinding up your leaves rather than sending them to the dump. Don't have a shredder? Rake the leaves into rows and run over them with a mower, preferably one with a bagger attachment.
• Plan for planting. Buying on impulse can be costly and labor-intensive in the future. Before hitting the stores, determine "What does this particular site need?" Select plants that will do well in the available site conditions. Consider the mature size of the plant, also.
• Purchase spring-flowering bulbs and store them in a cool place until chilly weather sets in and you can plant them. Daffodils, Spanish Bluebells (Hyacinthoides hispanicus), and Snowflakes (Leucojum aestivum) are bulbs to consider. By contrast, Tulips and Dutch hyacinths decline after their first season in Johnston County, and are best treated as annuals.
• Compost your yard waste! As you cut back perennials in preparation for winter, think about returning that bounty to your garden in the form of compost. Compost is nature's favorite fertilizer and soil conditioner. Recycle grass clippings, leaves, and non-diseased garden refuse. E.mail me for a copy of a publication on how to create compost.
• Wait to prune trees and shrubs. Pruning before dormancy may induce tender, new growth that will not have time to harden off before the first frost.
• Take cuttings of begonias, coleus, geraniums and impatiens to root and grow indoors during winter.
• Remove bagworms from evergreens to greatly minimize their population numbers for next year. The eggs for next years caterpillars are in the bag.
Trigger roses into dormancy by no longer deadheading spent flowers and allow rose hips to form.

- Avoid cool season weeds by applying the appropriate pre-emergent herbicide to plant beds and turf areas that had cool season weeds last year.
- Coddle Holiday Cactus - Leave your holiday cactus outdoors in a spot that gets a few hours of bright sun and no light after dark. Give it regular water and fertilizer. The combination of attentive care, bright daytime, and long, dark nights sets the stage for heavy flower bud production in early winter.

**VEGETABLES & FRUITS**

- Plant a cover crop in your vegetable garden. Legumes, such as clover and alfalfa, will enrich the soil by fixing nitrogen. Cover crops prevent erosion and can be turned over to decompose in the soil and provide needed organic matter.
- Consider planting a fruit tree. The ideal time to plant is December. We will be starting our tree fruit and nut sale in October in preparation for delivery and planting in December.
- Good sanitation is important for disease and insect control. Thoroughly clean up fallen leaves and fruit. Don’t forget fruit left hanging on trees.
- Dig sweet potatoes before frost.
- Keep pecans picked up. Weevil larva for next year’s populations will crawl out of the nuts and overwinter in the soil if the nuts are not picked up.
- Build a cold frame to plant cool-weather vegetables for harvest into early winter.
- If you are concerned that nematodes may be causing problems, NCDA offers a test for only $3.00 to check for nematodes. The forms, boxes and bags are available at the Cooperative Extension office.

**HOUSEPLANTS**

- Store tender tubers - such as dahlia, caladium, gladiolus, geranium, and tuberous begonia - which may not overwinter in the garden. Lift roots, tubers, or corms about the time of our first killing frost, just after their foliage dries. Dig deep enough so that the roots will not be snapped apart when lifted from the soil. Leave soil around dahlia tubers, canna, and caladium roots.
- Store tubers in a dry, cool, frost-free place such as a basement. Do not store on back porch or in garage; these plants cannot withstand freezing. Also, store them where rodents will not eat them.
- Geraniums can be overwintered in pots, or bare root in paper bags. Store in a garage or other building until soil dries and falls away from plant parts. Shake soil off roots and tubers, and cut away dried stem. Discard any plant parts that show soft spots or disease. Place tubers and roots in old sawdust or peatmoss, in a flat box or plastic bag with holes for ventilation.
- Check your houseplants for insects before bringing them indoors. A few insects on plants outside can easily turn into a problem inside. Giving plants a bath with mild soap often does a good clean up job.