

TOM'S GARDEN

BLOG NOVEMBER 2023

The growing season is finally over, and we can relax, right? Well, not just yet. What about digging and storing dahlias, canna lilies, and elephant ears. Planting garlic and tulips is another late fall chore. Do you have leaves to rake and bag up? Whew! It never ends.

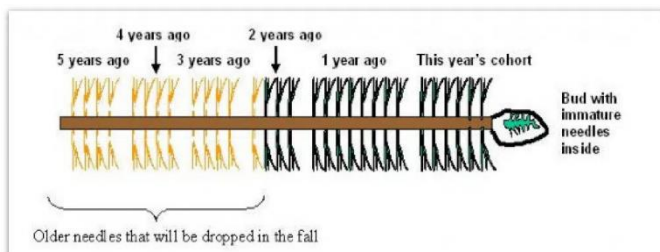
Don't stress, we will still have good weather days to get all these things done. November can be a mix of good and bad weather.

Pine Tree Logic

Are your pine and other conifer trees turning brown and dropping needles? Don't Panic, it's not a disease!

These evergreens turn color in fall and lose their interior needles to stay healthy and make room for new growth. It's part of their normal life cycle. By shedding some of these needles, the weight of snow and ice during winter is less likely to break branches. Stress from the environment like drought and heat can also be a factor.

Needles will begin dropping from the interior of a branch (not far from the tip) and will fall on their own. The inner needles are the oldest and get shaded by new growth.



This diagram is from "Ask Extension."



If your trees look like this diagram, you shouldn't worry, your conifer is aging and shedding naturally.

All conifers lose needles but vary in the amount and timing. Some turn brown all at the same time and some turn gradually before they drop. White pines are known to have a dramatic and abrupt drop of needles which makes you think something is wrong. They drop all their needles except for the current and previous year.

Spruce trees will keep their needles for several years and drop them gradually.

During a drought period, it's common for some conifers to drop half their needles in autumn to preserve moisture.

Needles can live several years on an evergreen, so most trees during normal times lose them every 2 to 5 years.

Some Southern pine needles can be as much as 12 inches long and are sought by crafters.

A few species are considered deciduous conifers and drop all their needles every fall. Dawn redwood and bald cypress are on this list.

Old needles lost in fall from healthy trees are always replaced by new growth in spring.



If you are seeing browning at the tips of branches any time of year, this might be caused by aphids or mites, diseases or tip blight, root damage from heavy equipment or construction, or road salt damage.



This is normal Scotch pine browning.

Bat Facts

Bats play an important role in our environment by pollinating vital plants and eating those pesky mosquitos at night. They can eat more than their body weight every night.

Baby bats are called “pups” and most mothers only give birth to one a year. They are one of nature’s unsung heroes.

Bats can help keep bug populations in check and have the ability to fly and find food in total darkness. They can live more than 30 years and fly at speeds of 60 miles per hour.

Their droppings are one of the richest fertilizers known.



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What do bats do in winter?

When cold weather drives insects away, bats must either hibernate or migrate to a warmer climate. That depends on the species. Bats in Florida remain all year long. In very cold northern climates a bat may hibernate for 6 months. Bats will hibernate in caves, mines, rock crevices and attics of homes and buildings.

Some bats move between winter and summer habitats. When food becomes scarce, they fly south to areas that have insect populations. Bats can’t survive freezing temperatures even if they are hibernating.

Fun Fact: Bats are the only mammal that can fly.

**Gardening is a Science and
An Art Form**

Creating Backyard Habitat

Stark Soil and Water Conservation District

Creating a habitat in your backyard is an opportunity for you to observe and forge a connection with the natural world as well as providing a secure location for wildlife.

Backyard habitats are small-scale ecosystems that provide water, food, shelter, and places to raise young.

In urban areas, backyard habitats are often the safest place for wildlife, out of reach of cars and other perils of urban life. In rural areas, backyard habitats act as an alternative to habitats that may have been removed or altered to make room for agriculture. Crafting a backyard habitat can be a great hobby for you, or a fun bonding activity for a family. They add beauty and interest to your property while meeting the needs of your local wildlife.

To create your habitat, you should provide 3 food sources, 1 water source, 2 shelter options, and 2 places to raise young. When choosing how to meet the requirements, try to focus on the needs of local wildlife, and remember that you don't have to meet all the needs for every local species.

Some great food sources include native plants that produce nuts, fruits, or seeds, also, decomposing trees or stumps that attract fungus and insects. Water sources can be a pond, lake, stream, bird bath, or rain garden. Shelter options and places to raise young are often one and the same and can include meadows, forested areas, ponds, lakes, streams, bird boxes, bat boxes, and rock or log piles.

There are many more options in each category, and as you can see many natural features such as ponds, log piles, or native trees can fall into more than one category. If you are interested in creating your own backyard habitat, contact the Stark Soil office at (330) 451-7645 or your local soil district for suggestions and more information.

Orchid Sense or Nonsense

***To water your orchids, just place ice cubes on top of the growing media.**

Nonsense: Over time, this watering method will damage or even kill the roots. Most orchids grown in the home are from tropical areas where freezing is rare. Orchids have fragile, sensitive roots.

Sense: Instead, use distilled water or rainwater that is at room temperature. That prevents mineral buildup on the roots. Water thoroughly and let it drain.

***Mist your orchid leaves daily.**

Nonsense: Misting should be avoided because it will cause bacteria and diseases to form. Avoid getting water on the leaves.

Sense: You can mist the aerial roots which hydrate the orchid if they are grown in a hanging basket or bare root.

***If the orchid's flowers fall off, it's a bad sign.**

Nonsense: If your blooms fall off, it may mean the orchid has already been blooming for a long time. This is true especially if it was received as a gift.

Sense: If the orchid is new to you, it may be because of a different environment or sudden temperature change.