

SIMPLY GARDENING

by Doug Green

October is such an interesting month. A clear day gives all gardeners lots of energy while the blustery days remind us of the winter which is just around the corner. Early October is still a good time to plant evergreens and shrubs for next year. Generally speaking, you can do a lot of fall planting right up to the middle of the month and expect full survival through the winter. I know at our nursery we are still propagating and dividing perennials right up to that date. We simply divide them, pot up the ones for sale and replant the rest. We have already planted the shrub cuttings by the end of September for harvest in 1993 but we could just have easily waited until the middle of October.

The critical factor in fall planting is the soil temperature. Roots will continue to develop and grow as long as the soil temperature is above freezing. Even if the top of the plant is dormant, the stored food in the roots will enable the plant to establish itself well in the fall. Some experts say that planting in the fall lets the roots use the stored food without having to spend energy developing leaves; then in the spring when the plant is called on the leaf out, it has a full root system to call on to gather food and get leaf development.

The bottom line then is that fall planting is a good idea for most trees and shrubs. There are a few exceptions and a good nursery will be able to tell you about them {eg Oriental poppies, Poplar trees}. If you want your garden to get a headstart, plant perennials, shrubs and trees in the fall.

One other thing that I often do in the fall after the foliage is dead is add mulch. Its easier to do this job now when there is no foliage getting in the way and I don't have to stomp on tender new shoots. It makes the bed look good for the winter and ready for spring. I like to make my garden beds look in the fall as I would like to find them in the spring.

I try as much as possible to cut down all dead perennial foliage and cart it off to the compost pile. While some gardeners like to say that perennial foliage adds artistic winter silhouettes to their garden, I think it looks like a bunch of dead plants and I cut them all down. Removing the dead

foliage also assists in removing egg masses of overwintering insects which will plague your plants next year. In our own flower beds we very rarely find it necessary to use any spray and this year we only used b.t. once or twice on a few caterpillar type chewing insects. Removing the potential problem in the fall is easier and healthier than having to spray to solve a problem the following summer.

Those of you who try to keep poinsettias over from winter to winter should be reminded that poinsettias will be developing their flower bracts in the first two weeks of October. While you can not see them at this stage, the plant is already making its plans for Christmas blooms. Feed it well until October 15 with a high Nitrogen fertilizer {20-20-20} and then switch to a fertilizer with a lower Nitrogen count {5-15-15 or similar}. Make very

sure that the poinsettia does not get any artificial light. Giving it artificial light {by turning on the room light} will cause it to delay its flowering. If you give it enough artificial light, it will not flower at all. Some people put them in closets, some cover them with dark cloths. I happen to be biased about it because we grow several thousand in the greenhouses but I would never bother trying to get one to bloom in the house- its too much work.

A final thought for the month. Flower pots and nursery containers can be recycled so wherever you get your plants, take the trays, and pots back to let the greenhouse use them again. If the greenhouse where you shop does not recycle- return them to us and we'll recycle them.

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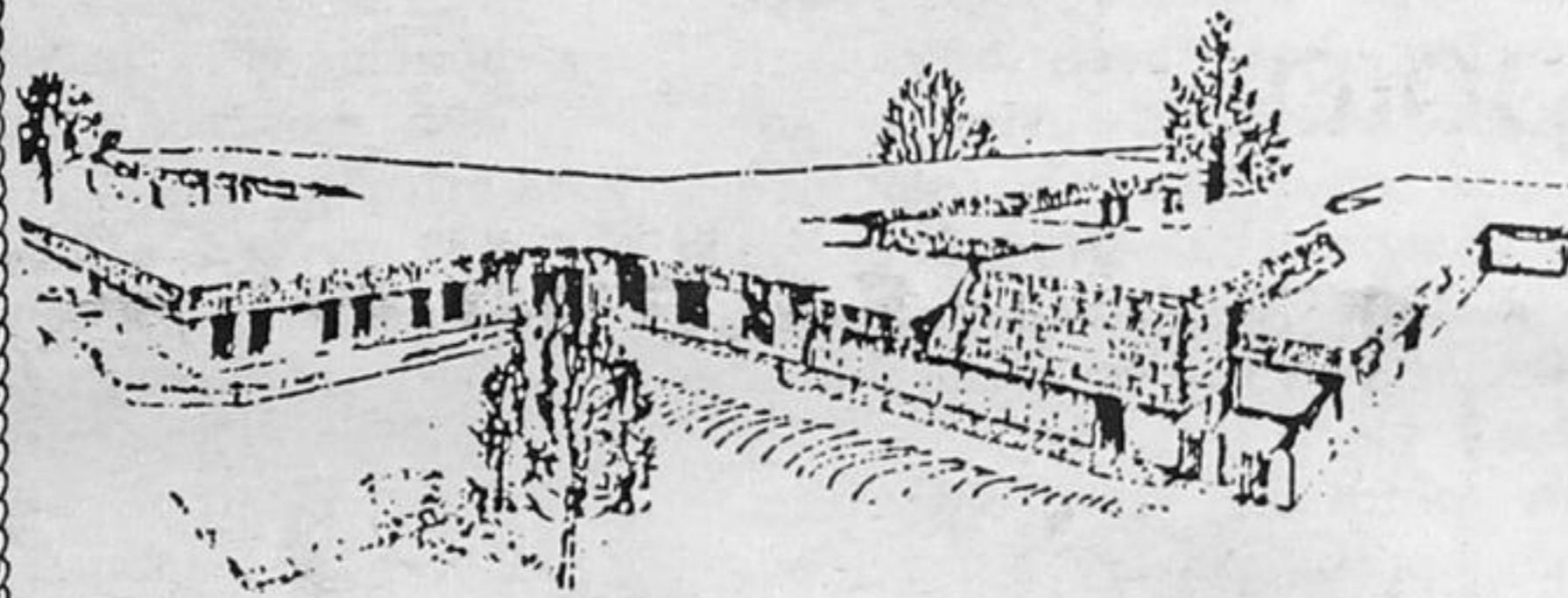
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