November 2013 Hilltop Garden Tips

- If you are seeing 1-2 foot twigs on the lawn, you might be seeing the results of an insect called twig girdler at work. This can be confirmed with close inspection of the base of the twig revealing even, conical cuts, as if produced by a miniature beavers. Rarely seen adults are about ½-¾ inch long and grayish-brown with long antennae and a light colored, band on each wing cover. Females deposit 3-8 eggs singly beneath bark in slits in a terminal or lateral twig and then she proceeds to girdle the twig by chewing a V-shaped groove around its circumference causing the twig to break off. Eggs hatch in fall, and larvae remain dormant inside the fallen twigs. In the spring, the larvae feed on the woody portion of the twig while tunneling toward the broken end. Common hosts of twig girdlers include hickory and pecan, as well as numerous other shade, nut and fruit trees. You can prevent future damage by picking up and disposing of the fallen twigs. Off course, if your neighbors don’t pick up fallen twigs, you will get some of those adults to visit your trees again next fall.

- Consider planting plants with berries to add interest to the fall garden. Examples include: American Beautyberry, deciduous Holly, bittersweet, strawberry bush, burford Holly, Chinese Holly, Foster Holly, Nellie R. Stevens Holly, Nandina, Pyracantha, Washington Hawthorn, and Dogwood.

- At writing we have had spotted frosts. After we get our first hard killing frost, 28 degrees, garden cleanup gets into full gear. Perennial flowerbeds get a fresh look once cleaned and with a new layer of mulch, being careful not to cover crowns of perennials. Asparagus need to be cut back and bedded in with a fresh layer of compost or well rotted manure. Strawberry beds need a cleaning as well. Mulch strawberry beds to prevent winter weeds but be careful not to cover its green leaves and crown.

- Our weather conditions are giving us a later fall color in the Ozarks which I hope will run into mid November. One of my daughters is getting married at Cooper Chapel in Bella Vista on Nov 16 and with all the glass, the trees with fall color will make for a beautiful affair. Hybrid red maples are in full glory now. If you have one of these and you planted it in the past 3 years, you need to take preventative action this fall so you will not end up with South West injury. This trunk injury happens because these young red maple hybrids have very thin bark which allows the trunk to warm up with the sun striking the trunk on the SW side. The cambium layer on that side starts to divide and grow on a warm winter day, thinking spring is near but subsequent low temperatures is sure death to this portion of the cambium. Once these trees get some age on them, the bark becomes thicker and corky which will prevent cambium from starting to grow prematurely. So, you can give your young red maple “fake bark” by wrapping the trunk up too or beyond the first limbs. Tree wraps need to be removed at spring green up. Repeat this each fall for up to 3 years to protect young trees from being scarred for life.

- This month, rake up leaves and fallen rotten fruit from around fruit trees to help control insect populations and remove disease-causing organisms that overwinter on leaf and fruit debris. If you had peach leaf curl this past spring, you can make your first winter application of chlorothalonil or a copper based spray as soon as all the leaves have fallen. Then make a second application before spring bud swell on a warm day in late February.

- Last call to dig caladium bulbs, dahlia tubers, elephant ear corms, and ornamental sweet potato tubers for winter storage. Dahlia’s and elephant ears can overwinter in place if they are heavily mulched. Once dug, air dry for a couple of weeks before wrapping and storing in a dry cool place.

- Cut faded chrysanthemums and asters to 3 inches above ground. Mulch up around them like other perennials. Newly planted mums and asters will need winter watering occasionally.

- For winter color and interest in the garden, plant Lenten Rose (*Helleborus orientalis*). It’s an evergreen perennial that blooms fall, winter or early spring and comes in an array of colors. We are not using this plant enough in our gardens.