October 2013 Hilltop Garden Tips

- Pumpkins are now available in a range of colors at garden centers and local farmers markets. Look for ones that are firm and unblemished and have their stems still attached. Keep in a cool, dry spot to extend their use outside.
- Begin planting pansies in your beds to get roots established before colder weather sets in. Set out transplants in a sunny location in rich, well-drained soil. Use ornamental cabbages or kales as a backdrop for the blooms.
- The average first spotted frost for our area is Oct 19 and we can expect the first killing frost (below 28 degrees F) the first week of November. Protect and extend your flowers and vegetables by covering them with blankets or floating row covers.
- Keep up with leaves falling onto the lawn and hard surfaces. Use a mulching blade to mow over leaves and let bits decompose into the lawn. Add a bag to your mower and gather leaves as you mow, tossing chopped pieces onto the compost pile or around perennials as mulch.
- Collect seeds from plants such as four o'clocks, cleome, and morning glory. Clip whole flower heads of cosmos, zinnia, and *Tithonia* and dry them on screens. Remove seeds from dried flower heads, and store in a cool, dry place in tightly sealed containers.
- Sketch out where you planted various vegetables in your garden. This will come in handy next spring when you plant, so you can rotate your crops to help prevent disease.
- Begin to lift caladiums for winter storage, if you plan to replant them next spring. Any time from now until the first frost, they can be lifted. Cut the foliage off; allow the bulbs to air day (out of direct sunlight). Once dry, store them in a cardboard box with a layer of dry peat moss or perlite under them. Make sure the bulbs are not touching each other, and then cover them completely with more peat moss or perlite.
- Other summer bulbs such as cannas and elephant ears, normally overwinter fine, provided the leaves are cut off following the killing frost and they are mulched with leaves, pine needles, etc. They also can be lifted if you want, but it is much easier to leave them in the ground.