Fall is for Planting in Lea County Gardens

By: David Hooten,

While most people think of spring as the best time for planting, avid gardeners know fall can actually be the best time in Lea County, New Mexico.

Annual flowering plants are usually a spring planting along with trees and shrubs through the summer months. Annuals freeze out with the first hard freeze. Although perennial plants grow and come back year after year in the gardens they establish best with fall plantings, which saves time and money.

With monsoon (rainy) season in all of New Mexico, Lea County gardens and landscapes are well suited for fall plantings of trees, shrubs, spring bulbs, and fall flowers. The cooler temperatures and the rainfall activity help the plant’s roots become well established. The warm fall soil encourages roots to grow until the ground freezes. Plants planted in the spring are in cold soil and this slows plant growth. If planted in late spring to summer, the plant(s) may become extremely stressed due to the high temperatures we experience in Lea County towards the end of May and into June. Drought conditions and high winds will aid in insufficient root development.

Spring flowering bulbs are an exception and they need to be planted in late October to mid-November for all of southern New Mexico counties. Early planting of tulips, daffodils and hyacinths and other spring bulb types will sprout if planted in September and you will lose all spring blooms. Timing and seasonal planting are important on the spring bulbs. Buy bulbs now and store in a cool place or in the bottom of the vegetable crisper, the added chilling effect is excellent on the tulips and hyacinths. DO NOT let them freeze.

Right now seasonal fall color is coming onto the various markets in Lea County. Gardeners need to buy now while selections of pansies, violas, ornamental kales and cabbages, mums are available. These fall plants need to be planted now so they can hardened up before the hard freezes come in late October and November. Planting these plants now will ensure color through the winter season and up to May and June when they need to be replaced. Waiting to plant pansies, violas, kale and cabbage in November to December will freeze out or be severely damaged as these plants are coming from a warm greenhouse environment and have not been hardened-off to the cold temperatures. Buy compact plants with few blooms showing, pass on leggy stretched growth on pansy and viola plants they will not recover and look good. Kale and cabbage should be a compact and fresh looking plant not straggly.

Ornamental kales and cabbages need to be bought now so they can harden off become the coming frosts.
Black Violas adorned the carved pumpkins to carry out the Halloween theme.

Violas (Johnny-jump-ups) are another fantastic bloomers and are quite fragrant for the patio or front door beds. These also need to be now for the winter hardening off process and great assortments of color are available to the gardener.

Pansies come in all color ranges, "faced", "cat whiskers", "ruffles and lace", "solids".

Spring Flowering bulbs need to bought now for spring 2015 blooms.

Planting spring bulbs for Lea County should be done in late October to mid-November for spring blooms.

How about creating some excitement and show-stopping eye appeal for the public. Create an ornamental kale and cabbage tree in your front yard.

All fall plants and especially pansies need ample moisture around their roots to stay healthy and growing into a nice compact blooming machine in your garden. There are many varieties of these plants on the market tables and all will do well in Lea County.