

Thinking about a greenhouse? Fall is best time to start one

BY JENNA CLARK
Dengarden

If you’ve always dreamed about starting a greenhouse, right now is not a bad tie to make that dream a reality. While the time you set up a greenhouse might differ depending on your schedule, gardening goals and region, fall is generally a favorable time to make some headway on this project.

Since starting a greenhouse can be an involved process when it comes to construction and maintenance, professional advice can go a long way to helping you build or choose the correct greenhouse for your needs. We chatted with several gardening experts to learn more about starting a greenhouse. Learn about the different types of greenhouses out there, how to narrow down which type is best for your gardening needs, the associated costs you’ll need to consider as you take on this project and the best plants to grow in a greenhouse.

WHY FALL IS THE BEST TIME TO START A GREENHOUSE

John Faerber, director of horticulture, landscaping and floral at The Lake House on Canandaigua, notes that fall is the best time of year to start a greenhouse for several reasons. “Cooler temperatures are well suited to crops such as lettuce, spinach, kale, carrots and many herbs, while a greenhouse provides additional protection as temperatures begin to drop,” says Faerber.

“Starting in fall also allows gardeners to extend the season beyond the first frost and gives them time to



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Commercial greenhouses are larger and generally designed with the intention of generating income, whereas hobby greenhouses are usually smaller and serve as a home for plants a person may want to have access to during cooler months.

learn how their greenhouse performs before the coldest winter weather arrives,” he adds. Another reason to start a greenhouse in the fall months is that pests don’t usually cause many issues during this season.

While this might seem obvious, Dr. Kimberly Moore, associate center director and professor of environmental horticulture at the University of Florida, IFAS, Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center, notes that the cool but mild temperatures can be helpful as the ground won’t be frozen. That said, keep in mind that there is less daylight available; you’ll need to factor this into your gardening schedule.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF GREENHOUSES?

There are several types of greenhouses to consider. David Trinklein, adjunct associate professor and extension specialist at the University of Missouri, notes that most of the differences between greenhouses have to do with their function and intended use (commercial, educational or hobby gardening).

Commercial greenhouses are larger and generally designed with the intention of generating income, whereas hobby greenhouses are usually smaller (and attached to a building) and serve as a home for plants a person may want to have

access to during cooler months. Greenhouses designed for education or research purposes are usually designed to accommodate many students, while simultaneously producing a large volume of plants.

With this in mind, there are different ways greenhouses can be architecturally differentiated. Moore notes that “lean-to” and “freestanding” greenhouses are some common types. Justin Hancock, horticulturist at Costa Farms, adds that “hoophouses” are also popular.

You may be familiar with a “lean-to” greenhouse, as this type of greenhouse is usually the one most people have that is “added on” to

their home. According to Moore, “lean-to” greenhouses are often more affordable for smaller gardens because of their shared wall.

A “freestanding” greenhouse is exactly what the name suggests. It is a structure that stands alone and doesn’t need a house or another type of building for support.

Moore notes that hoop houses are easy to set up, which can be beneficial for beginner gardeners. “If all I wanted to do was extend my growing season, I would use a hoop house,” she explains. A “hoophouse” is just that: a structure that’s shaped like a hoop or a tunnel, thick and often made of plastic.

WHAT COSTS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH GREENHOUSES?

Maintaining a greenhouse is not an inexpensive endeavor. Trinklein notes that glass-clad greenhouses is more expensive to construct and maintain than one made with a polyethylene plastic-covered steel frame.

While this may be the case, there are different costs associated with each type of greenhouse that you should make yourself aware of before deciding which route you’d like to take.

First, “there’s a cost per square foot for just putting up the greenhouse with nothing in it, and then you multiply that several times by benches, automated watering equipment, automated fertilizer equipment and so forth,” Trinklein says.

Faerber notes that heating, ventilation and the items you’ll need to prepare the site for your greenhouse are other cost considerations that you should keep in mind.

While plastic greenhouses are more popular, they don’t last as long and require replacement (usually after about five years), which can be costly.

WHAT CAN YOU GROW IN A GREENHOUSE?

The possibilities are essentially endless when it comes to what you can grow in a greenhouse. That said, our experts note that certain types of greenhouses are better for supporting certain types of growing.

According to Hancock, “hoophouses” are usually suitable for growing leafy greens, brussels sprouts, broccoli and other cool-season vegetables. If you want to grow flowers in this type of greenhouse, Faerber says that pansies, snapdragons and violas are solid picks.

When it comes to “lean-to” greenhouses, seeds and cuttings can be good choices. You can really grow anything in “freestanding” greenhouses.

6 signs you have lawn grubs – and what to do about them this fall

BY JULIE ANDREWS
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Fall is a good time to take a closer look at what is happening beneath your lawn and garden beds. While cooler temperatures and shorter days signal the end of the growing season, they can also reveal a problem that is easy to overlook during the summer – grubs. These small, C-shaped larvae live beneath the soil and feed on plant roots, potentially causing damage that becomes increasingly obvious as the season progresses.

A few grubs in your soil are perfectly normal. The trouble starts when their numbers build up in a concentrated area. As grubs feed on roots, grass can begin to thin, yellow, wilt or die. Garden plants may show similar symptoms, even when there is no obvious problem above ground. By fall, these symptoms can be mistaken for ordinary seasonal decline, making it important to investigate before assuming your plants are simply winding down for winter.

The good news is that fall also provides an opportunity to check for grubs and take action. If you’re already pulling out spent plants, turning over soil or preparing beds for a cover crop, you have a convenient chance to see what is happening below the surface – and address a grub problem before it carries into another growing season.

Lawn grubs are the immature, larval stage of certain beetles. They live in



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Lawn grubs are the immature, larval stage of certain beetles. They live in the soil and feed on plant roots.

the soil and feed on plant roots, including the roots that help keep turf healthy and growing.

“Grubs feed on living root systems across a wide range of plants,” says gardening expert Taylor Bradford. When those roots are damaged, plants become stressed and stunted and can become more vulnerable to disease. In severe infestations, the damage can be enough to kill plants outright.

Although the word “lawn” is in the name, grubs aren’t necessarily confined to turf. They can also turn up in garden beds, where their root-feeding habits can cause plants to decline without an immediately obvious explanation.

That makes fall an especially useful time to investigate. As Bradford explains, people can easily check for grubs while they’re already working in the soil – whether they’re removing spring or summer crops, turning over a garden bed, or preparing the ground for a cover crop.

Don’t panic if you uncov-

er one or two. Bradford notes that finding a few grubs is completely normal. The bigger concern is a concentrated population. Finding roughly seven to 10 or more grubs in one area is a good indication that it’s time to take action.

6 SIGNS OF A LAWN GRUB INFESTATION

Grub damage can look like several other common lawn and garden problems. Here are six clues that can help you determine whether grubs are behind what you’re seeing:

1. Your grass is yellowing or dying: One of the most obvious signs is grass that begins to yellow, thin out or die despite otherwise reasonable growing conditions. Because grubs damage the roots underneath the turf, affected areas may gradually lose their ability to take up water and nutrients.

Look for irregular patches rather than assuming the entire lawn is experiencing a seasonal change. If one section is struggling while nearby grass remains healthy, investigate the soil

beneath the damaged area.

2. Plants are wilting without an obvious cause: The same root damage can occur in garden beds. Bradford says the most telling sign of a grub infestation is “wilting, yellowing or dying plants that have no obvious above-ground reason for struggling.”

If a plant is receiving adequate water and sunlight and doesn’t show signs of an obvious pest or disease problem, its roots may be worth examining.

3. Plants become stunted or unusually weak: Root damage doesn’t always kill a plant immediately. Sometimes the first clue is simply that plants aren’t growing as expected. They may remain smaller than neighboring plants, produce less foliage or generally look stressed.

Because healthy roots are essential for water and nutrient uptake, continued feeding by grubs can leave plants increasingly vulnerable as the infestation grows.

4. You notice more digging animals around the lawn: If birds, skunks, raccoons or other animals suddenly seem very interested in particular areas of your lawn, there may be something beneath the surface attracting them. Grubs can serve as food for wildlife, so increased digging can sometimes point to activity underground.

It’s not definitive proof of an infestation, but it’s a useful reason to inspect the soil rather than simply repairing the disturbed turf.

5. You find grubs when working the soil or in the

yard: Sometimes the simplest sign is the most useful – actually finding the grubs.

Fall garden cleanup provides a convenient opportunity to check. When you’re removing old plants or turning over soil, pay attention to what you uncover. A few grubs aren’t cause for concern, but Bradford recommends taking action if you’re finding seven to 10 or more concentrated in one area.

The concentration matters because a handful of grubs scattered through a garden is very different from a large population feeding in the same section of soil.

6. Some grass and plants are thriving while others are dying: An unusual pattern in the garden can also provide a clue. Bradford points out that grubs tend to leave legumes alone. That means peas and beans may remain healthy while surrounding plants begin to struggle.

“If your peas and beans are fine but everything around them is declining,” Bradford says, “the roots are worth investigating.”

This kind of contrast can help you distinguish a localized root problem from broader issues such as drought, poor soil or seasonal changes. Same goes for grass. If certain parts of your lawn are struggling, there may be grubs concentrated in that area.

HOW TO TREAT LAWN GRUBS THIS FALL

Once you’ve confirmed a grub problem, you don’t necessarily need to reach immediately for a harsh treatment. In a smaller garden bed, physical removal can be an effective place to start.

Bradford recommends tilling or broadforking the soil to expose grubs, fol-

lowed by hand-picking them out. This approach is particularly practical in small beds where you can work through the affected soil carefully.

For gardeners looking for organic treatment options, Bradford recommends beneficial nematodes, BT and Milky Spore. Each can provide a way to target grub populations without relying on conventional broad-spectrum treatments.

There is, however, an important consideration when using nematodes. Some species can harm ground-dwelling bees. If you’re treating an in-ground garden, Bradford recommends spot-treating close to the soil rather than spraying directly onto plants. Applying the treatment at dusk, when bees are less active, can also help reduce the risk to pollinators.

The key is not to treat simply because you found a grub or two. Start by determining whether you actually have a significant concentration. Then choose a treatment appropriate for the size and location of the infestation.

Fall cleanup is an ideal time to make that assessment. As you’re removing plants and preparing the garden for winter, take a few minutes to look below the surface. Catching a grub problem now can give you a head start on protecting your lawn and garden before the next growing season begins.

And remember – not every grub is an emergency. A healthy soil ecosystem can contain plenty of organisms that gardeners don’t necessarily notice. The goal isn’t to eliminate every grub you encounter. It’s to recognize when their numbers are high enough to threaten your plants and respond accordingly.