

Putting Your Garden to Bed for the Winter

Although the growing season for plants above the ground is pretty much finished, remember that the roots of most plants continue to grow right up until the ground freezes in later November. Bulbs, trees and shrubs exhibit tremendous root growth between mid-October and late November. Here are some tips for your home landscape:

Lawns: This is not a good time to fertilize or try to plant grass seed but lime may be applied at any time. Bring us a sample of soil to test and we will tell you exactly how much lime, if any, to apply. Mow fallen leaves into mulch and leave grass at 2.5 inches for the winter

Annuals: Pull spent annuals and scatter seeds, some may volunteer next year i.e. impatiens, petunia, calendula, cleome, zinnia, etc. Snapdragons may overwinter as may pansies; geraniums may be saved as houseplants or stored in the basement.

Bulbs: Dig up gladiolas, canna, dahlia, tuberous begonias, allow them to dry out at room temperature and store in dry peat moss in a cool basement. The little bulbils that are attached to gladiolas corms may be separated and planted next year but they need several years of growth to mature into flowering size corms.

Biennials: Scatter seeds of hollyhocks, honesty and other biennials. Pull out spent plants and compost the debris.

Perennials: Cut back the tops to 2 or 3 inches, remove all spent debris, apply 2-3 inches bark or woodchip mulch when the ground freezes in late November, store wood chip or bark mulch where it will not freeze solid. It is getting too late to transplant or divide perennials.

Vegetables: Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, carrots and parsnips all taste better after several frosts. Spinach and carrots, as well as parsnips, may over winter if mulched with 3 to 4 inches of clean straw. Clean up the garden and remove all debris, sterilize tomato cages with a mild bleach solution, (one-half cup bleach in a gallon of water) wash gourds and pumpkins with mild bleach solution also, cure winter squash at 75 degrees for 2 weeks then store at 40 degrees and dry. Eat your acorn squash first, butternut squash usually stores longer with no loss of quality.

Shrubs: Do not prune spring flowering shrubs now! Remove dead wood anytime, root prune shrubs now that will be transplanted next year.

Roses: Shrub roses, wait until mid-December to cut back to 3 or 4 main canes, cut at 12 inches, hill up unfrozen soil around base of grafted types (not leaves or chips) climbers: cut back to 6 feet, bundle canes and wrap in burlap, lay down on ground if possible

Trees: Prune only dead or injured wood now. This is not a good time to prune trees in general. Fertilize ailing trees around Thanksgiving, using one pound 5-10-10 per inch of circumference measured at 4.5 feet above the ground.

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