



Putting the Garden to Bed for the Winter

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Indian Summer days bring a gradual temperature cool-down to our area. Sunny days and cooler nights keep the dew on the grass well into the morning and make gardening a pleasure. Finishing the season and tucking your garden in for the winter takes a little planning ---but leaving your garden neat and tidy will pay huge dividends in the Spring.

Fall is a wonderful time to work on your flower beds and shrubs. It is also a perfect time to plant or transplant perennials, shrubs and trees. Identify the gaps in your flower beds and plant something new to extend your bloom season. Think of adding very early blooming perennials such as Hellebores and Pulmonaria. Berries in a garden really stand out in the Fall. You could include purple Beauty Bush, Snowberry, Winterberry, Jetbead, Hollies and Viburnums. Some shrubs and trees will add bursts of color: the burgundy of Fothergilla and Itea, the fiery red of Enkianthus, and the many shades of Japanese Maples.

This is also a good time to assess your garden borders and make some changes while the over-all impression is fresh in your mind. Fall planting is a great time to get a jump on the next season and to plan for fuller and longer bloom periods in the garden.

Hosta, Daylilies, Bearded Iris and Peonies can be divided now. Keep the new transplants well-watered through the rest of the growing season. Most daylily clumps should be divided every 5-7 years and each clump will yield 4-6 divisions. Make sure your new transplants are well mulched going into winter.

Do not fertilize or prune roses --- wait for the Spring. If you have grafted roses and live in a cold pocket, you can protect the plants by hilling up the soil around the bases. Many of the new roses (i.e. Knockout, Home Run, Fairy) are grown on their own roots, making them hardier, and there is no need to hill up. If you are still cutting blooms, cutting shorter stems will discourage active growth. Rugosa, carolina, hugonis and virginiana are very hardy and need no attention other than trimming back any exceptionally long canes.

After a killing frost, cut off the leaves and dig up Dahlias, Gladioli, Cannas, Caladiums, Alocasia, Acidanthera and Colocasia. Clean off the soil and store the roots in vermiculite or the cedar shavings used in gerbil cages. They do well stored in boxes in the basement, protected from extremes of temperature. Be sure to label the boxes!

Continue to deadhead, water and weed. Cut off all yellow or brown leaves but let green leaves remain to nurture the plant and its root system. When cutting back some plants such as Echinaceae (coneflower) remember to leave some seed heads for the birds. Ornamental grasses and Perovskia (Russian sage) add winter effect to the garden; wait till spring to cut back. Remember: putting a garden to bed takes place over weeks, not in 3 days.

Don't cut down Lavender, Gaura (whirling butterflies), Clematis, Iberis (candytuft) and Buddleias until early Spring. Most Hydrangeas flower on old wood (as do Lilacs and Azaleas) and should not be cut back until after flowering. Trimming will only cut off next season's flowers. Annabelle (Hydrangea arborescens) and Hydrangea paniculata (PeeGee hydrangea) bloom on new wood and can be cut back hard in the Spring.

Put your garden clippings on the compost pile, layering them with fallen leaves. Leave your grasses uncut for winter interest and cut them down in early Spring. The birds will thank you!

Evergreens need to be well-watered before the start of winter but there is no need to fertilize them. Be sure to water newly planted, transplanted or divided perennials, shrubs or trees at least twice a week.

Lawns can be over seeded now and bare patches filled in until the third week of September. Fertilize lawns in early September with a slow release high nitrogen source (28-3-10 50% SCU) and again in mid November with a slow release high phosphorus source (15-30-15 30% SCU). Apply liquid broad leaf weed control in September.

In early September, Japanese Beetle eggs start to hatch and grub control should be applied now.

Deer start to establish their winter feeding routes in early fall ... this is a good time to start applying deer repellents.

The winter of 2007-08 brought major damage to all types of Ilex (holly) and Japanese Hollies. Rhododendrons and some Boxwoods were also affected. A late November application of an anti-transpirant (such as Wilt-Pruf) will help to protect your evergreens from winter desiccation and can also be sprayed on Hydrangeas and Japanese Maples. For best results, re-apply after a warm winter period in mid-February.

Planting Bulbs

Gardens can easily be enhanced by planning your bulb placements to take advantage of existing perennial gardens. Bulbs will bring early color to your garden, long before your perennials take over. The growth and spread of the perennials will cover up and disguise fading bulb foliage.

Bulbs should be in the ground by the middle of November. If you will see bulbs from your house, plant them in drifts, close together. Be sure to place some of the bulbs near your front door and near the garage so that you will see them as you come in and out, especially small and early flowering bulbs such as Iris reticulata, Iris danfordia, Snowdrops, Crocus, dwarf Daffodils and Anemone) Most bulbs, especially Daffodils, benefit from 6 hours of direct sunlight. It helps them produce next year's flowers! Make a note to fertilize very lightly with a low-nitrogen fertilizer as the shoots emerge from the ground in the Spring. And promise yourself that next Spring you will take pictures of your bulbs in bloom; it's hard to remember where everything is without pictorial proof!

Acer Garden bulbs are available for sale at the nursery. This year, varieties include Amaryllis, Daffodils, Alliums, Anemone, Chinodoxa, Crocus, Erythronium, Galanthus, Hyacinthoies, Iris (Botanical and Dutch), Leucojum, Muscari, Scilla and Tulips. All bulk and bagged bulbs are #1 grade.

And finally, clean, wash and store all your containers, wash out or discard your garden gloves, sweep the garage and go inside for a cup of tea and a long rest. You've more than earned it!