

Preparing your Perennial Garden for Winter

Now that we've had a couple of pretty good frosts, it's time to clean up your gardens and prepare for winter. Removing debris now reduces the potential for insect and disease problems next season.

With perennials, it's a good rule of thumb to cut back all perennials that do not have winter appeal. It is possible to leave some perennials standing. Sunflowers, liatris and other flowers that go to seed will provide food for wildlife. It's fun to watch finches on coneflowers picking out the seeds. Watching birds can give you hours of enjoyment in the winter garden.

If you have any heavy seeders in your garden that you would like to control, remove any seed heads at this time.

Any perennials with disease of any kind, remove foliage so that the disease can not overwinter under the plant and re-infect in spring. (Do not put this debris into compost.) I like to leave about 1-2" of stem on these plants so that I can find them in the spring and so that they can catch snow to help with overwintering.

Rake off, and remove debris from perennials that the foliage has turned to mush (Hosta is one of these.)

Don't cut back the following until spring:

- Butterfly bush
- Roses
- Russian Sage
- Caryopteris
- Heuchera
- Mums

Clematis – Refer to our clematis handout for trimming suggestions. No clematis NEEDS to be cut back for survival. However, some can overgrow their space. Trim according to the variety of Clematis you have.

Hydrangea – There are many different varieties out there. Know your variety and whether it blooms on old wood or new wood. Again, they do not NEED to be trimmed to survive, but if they are overgrown, it is wise to know if you trim your variety in fall or spring. If you don't know the variety, it is wise to trim just after blooming. This gives the plant a chance to form new flower buds if it happens to be a variety that blooms on old wood.

This is a good time to plant your spring bulbs.

Apply **mulch**, around tender plants (roses, hydrangeas, new perennials and new groundcover). Only apply 1-2 inches.

For **Roses** whose crown you are trying to protect, you may apply more, BUT, wait until the ground freezes! This is usually after Thanksgiving, sometimes in December. The idea is to keep the ground at a constant temperature, and avoid the freezing and thawing that takes place in the winter. In the spring, it is important to pull the mulch back from the crown to allow the trunk to dry out

Trees:

To avoid frost cracks in trees less than 5 years old, wrap your tree trunks with paper or plastic tree wraps in late fall. White wraps work best at reflecting the heat of winter sun to protect the bark. When wrapping, be sure to start winding at ground level and work your way up the trunk to just under the first set of branches. This way moisture will shed off the wrap instead of being channeled in toward the tree. Remember to remove the wrap in April so you don't provide a hiding place for insects.

These trees are most prone to frost cracks:

Acer's (Maple)

Malus (Apples, including Flowering Crabs)

Fraxinus (Ash)

Platanus (Sycamore)

Fagus (Beech)

Aesculus (Horsechestnut, Buckeye)