



10-Minute
University™



Fall Garden Maintenance

Overview

Fall is a good time to add new plantings, move or transplant shrubs and perennials, and mulch your garden beds. Diseases such as root rot, leaf spot, and stem cankers thrive in fall rain. Proper cleanup, such as removing fallen leaves, flowers, and dead branches, can prevent diseases from developing and is more effective than treating an infected plant.

General Tips

Know the **first frost date** in your area. In the Willamette Valley, this date is usually around the first week in October. Bring tender plants indoors to overwinter before then. Be sure to clean their leaves and check for insects or their eggs first.

Improve your **soil**. Amend the soil with compost to improve drainage. Soils high in organic matter tend to stay warmer in the winter, thus reducing plant loss. Test soil and, if needed, apply lime now. If alkalinity needs to be reduced, add sulphur.

Check if your plants need **watering** especially after prolonged dry and windy weather. Give extra attention to newly planted beds and plants under or near large established trees.

Look for **slugs and slug eggs** under boards and rocks and in dense foliage and kill them by squashing or cutting. Bait slugs whenever needed and be ready in early spring with another fresh application. Trap moles and gophers as well as controlling other pest problems.

Mulch is insulation. It keeps the soil around plant root cooler on warm days and warmer at cold nights. After plants are dormant, apply 3-4" of well composted garden mulch. Taper depth to leave the crowns of plants and tree trunks uncovered.

Remove and destroy **diseased plants** before they infect their neighbors. It is easier to spot tree and shrub diseases when leaves are present. Unless your compost pile heats to 160 degrees or higher, leave diseased plant parts out of your compost.

When removing diseased branches, prune two or three inches below the infected area. If you cut into the infected part of the limb, sterilize pruning equipment by wiping with rubbing alcohol or a solution of one part household bleach and nine parts water.

Ornamentals

Let some plants **self-sow** in the fall. After seedlings come up in the spring, thin to sculpt the color pattern you want. Sweet peas, sunflowers, columbine, annual delphiniums, poppies, calendula, nasturtiums, clarkia, alyssum and even petunias can be nurtured this way to return year after year. Annual herbs are willing self-sowers. Dill and cilantro can come back every year if the seed heads are left on the plant.

Gather herbs, seed heads and flowers for drying. **Collect dried seeds** from open pollinated flowers and vegetables for sowing next year.

Shorten **rose** canes to 30" or hip-high to prevent wind damage. Finish pruning roses in February. Prune summer-blooming shrubs in late winter or early spring. Fall pruning should be avoided as it stimulates new growth which is susceptible to winter damage.

Herbaceous perennials such as hostas, daylilies, astilbes, monardas, peonies, and solidagos die back to the ground in the fall and re-emerge in

the spring. Once frost turns their top brown, prune to the ground.

Semi-herbaceous perennials, such as rudbeckias, penstemons and Shasta daisies, lose upper foliage in the cold but retain basal foliage. Remove dead tops but leave 2-3 inches of green foliage at the base.

Plant **spring blooming bulbs** and divide large perennials such as daylilies, hellebores, and hostas. This will control their size and renew blooming.

Stake newly **planted deciduous trees** so they do not rock in the wind and loosen their roots. Remove the stakes in the spring.

Dig up **tender bulbs** such as dahlias, begonias, caladiums, cannas, and gladiolas. Wrap them in moist material and store in a cool, dark space.

Ornamental grasses have lovely seed heads in the fall and winter. It is best to prune them in the spring when young shoots begin to appear.

Rake up tree and shrub **leaves** and compost unless they show signs of disease.

Apply slow release fertilizer for your **lawn** to help boost root growth. Look for lawn fertilizer labeled for fall/winter applications. Apply herbicides to control broadleaf weeds. Thatch the lawn by raking it and overseed where the lawn is not thick and vigorous.

Edibles

Remove diseased plant refuse. Spade under or compost healthy crop refuse.

Remove old fruiting canes off of **raspberries, blackberries and boysenberries**.

Plant **cover crops** in the vegetable garden and newly established beds that are not yet planted. Cover crops provide valuable soil protection by reducing erosion, suppressing weeds, improving soil tilth and providing large amounts of organic

material. Examples of cover crops are: rye, crimson clover, hairy vetch, winter wheat. Have a plan for processing the cover crops before they go to seed.

Housekeeping Chores

- Clean out bird houses for use as roosting boxes in the winter or for use in the spring.
- Clean out cold frames for winter use.
- Store garden chemicals in a secure, dry place – away from kids and pets.
- Clean fallen leaves and debris from gutters and downspouts.
- Winterize irrigation system.
- Bring in clay pots or garden ornaments to prevent damage from fluctuating winter temperatures.
- Sharpen pruning shears and other cutting tools.
- Clean, sand and oil garden tools before storing them for the winter.
- Drain old gas in the lawn mower after the last mowing. Have the mower blades sharpened.

Resources

Oregon State University Extension Service,
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas), 503-821-1150 (Washington), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah).
- For 10-Minute University™ handouts, visit www.cmastergardeners.org or www.metromastergardeners.org
- Look for Master Gardeners at area Farmers' Markets.