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Winterizing Your Garden

Putting your garden to bed for the winter season is often one of the most rewarding tasks for the gardener. It's a great time to remember with pride the successes of the season, and at the same time, assess any problems that you may have encountered regarding the setting of individual plants or their general vigor.

Cutting Back Shrubs

Generally, it is suggested that most perennial plants be cut back in the fall, leaving 2"-4" stalks or stems. This will prevent an excess of dead and decaying foliage in your garden, reducing the risk of disease problems as the dead foliage decomposes. Trimmed plant material that is disease and insect free may be shredded and composted. Remove annuals as they finish blooming. Tender summer blooming bulbs such as Cannas, Dahlias and Gladiolus should be dug up for winter storage. For more information on winter bulb storage, please ask for our related handout.

Butterfly Bush, Hydrangeas and Blue Mist Spirea should not be cut back in the fall but left to winter over and pruned in the early spring when new bud growth shows at the base of the plant.

Fall Rose Care

Roses should have all leaf debris cleaned from around the plants. When pruning, do not cut the canes lower than 3'-4'. Climbing roses should not be pruned. In windy or exposed areas, the canes may be bundled loosely to prevent wind and snow breakage. Protect the crown with mulch, either in a rose collar or a mound. Water well in the late fall and any time there is prolonged dry periods during the winter. Water well and remove any winter damage in mid spring.

Fall Mulching

Mulch is used in the winter to prevent root damage from fluctuating temperatures and to keep the soil cool. Mulches should be applied to garden areas after the soil cools, usually around November 1st. Leaves may be used if they are small or shredded if they are large. Small or fine bark will work. Other options are straw, pine needles, or grass clippings. Avoid applying mulch directly over the crown of plants but apply over the perimeter.

Getting the Garden Ready for Next Spring

Remember that this time is an ideal one for taking note of any changes that you may want to make for next year. Since soils are warm and workable in the autumn, it is a perfect time to renew a small area or amend the soil for a new planting the next spring.

Fall is also the time to plant spring flowering bulbs such as crocus, tulips, or daffodils, anything that will add color and interest to the garden in the spring!