

# Preparing The Garden For Winter

By Stacy Parsons

- **Introduction**

- Autumn is an important time for your garden. Take the time to make notes on how your plants have performed this year. Take pictures.
- Consider moving those plants that show poor vigor or may have out grown their space.
- Which plants do you want to divide?
- Look at your trees and shrubs for pruning needs this winter.
- Is there fall/winter color in the garden? Consider planting annuals, perennials, and shrubs that keep the garden in color.
- Autumn Color in the Garden
- Frost Dates
- The University of Maryland Home and Garden Center website published a 'Fall Freeze-Date Table'.
- According to that table, there is a 10% chance of a 32 degree F. temperature on or about October 7 and a 90% chance on or about November 4-6 from College Park to Frederick.
- Plan to store tender plants and harvest herbs before those dates if your local area is prone to early frosts.
- Cut Back Most Perennials and Remove Annuals
- Dead and decaying foliage may cause disease problems.
- Prune perennials to a 2-4" height. Shred and compost disease and insect free leaves or recycle at your curb.
- Decide which perennials to leave up for winter interest. Think about pairing those that complement each other.
- Cut hollow stemmed plants such as hibiscus or persicaria at 8-10" to prevent water from freezing the crown.
- Remove annuals.
- Get soil tested for nutrient levels.
- Renew and amend the soil for next spring.

- **Perennials to Cut-Back**

- |              |                |             |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| ○ Alchemilla | ○ Euphorbia    | ○ Nepeta    |
| ○ Anemone    | ○ Geranium     | ○ Oenothera |
| ○ Campanula  | ○ Hemerocallis | ○ Phlox     |
| ○ Centaurea  | ○ Hosta        | ○ Trollius  |
| ○ Coreopsis  | ○ Lychnis      | ○ Veronica  |
| ○ Delphinium | ○ Monarda      |             |

- **Perennials With Disease or Insect Problems**

Cut back and destroy the foliage and leaf litter of these plants.

- Alcea
- Aquilegia
- Crocosmia
- Delphinium
- Helenium
- Heliopsis
- Hemerocallis
- Iris (cut only brown/damaged leaves)
- True Lilies
- Monarda
- Peonies
- Summer Phlox
- Trycyrtis
- Veronica

- **Perennials With Winter Interest**

- Ornamental grasses
- Rudbeckia
- Echinacea
- Achillea
- Agastache
- Aster
- Astilbe
- Baptisia
- Chelone
- Cimicifuga
- Eryngium
- Eupatorium
- Sedum
- Fronds of deciduous ferns
- Large sedges

- **Evergreen Perennials**

Prune only after blooming, leave alone in fall

- Ajuga
- Alyssum
- Armeria
- Artemisia
- Bergenia
- Corydalis
- Dianthus
- Epimedium (late winter)
- Euphorbia
- Helianthemum
- Helleborus
- Heuchera
- Iberis
- Kniphofia
- Lamium
- Lavender
- Liriope
- Origanum
- Phlox
- Primula
- Pulmonaria
- Sedum
- Thymus
- Viola

- **Woody-Stemmed Perennials**

Leave these perennials alone in fall then prune them to the desired height in the spring.

- Buddleia
- Caryopteris
- Erysimum 'Bowles Mauve'
- Hypericum
- Lavertera
- Perovskia
- Santolina

- **Dividing and Transplanting Plants**

- If the plant blooms between early spring and late June, then divide or move it in the fall.
- If the plant blooms after late June, then divide or move it in the spring.
- Shrubs
  - Do not cut back hydrangeas, buddleias, or spireas. Wait until early spring when new growth shows.

- Transplant shrubs now. Keep watered until the ground freezes.
    - Roses should not be pruned lower than 3-4 feet. Clean and remove all leaf debris. Canes may be bundled to prevent snow breakage. Protect the crown with mulch.
  - Tropical Plants
    - Non-hardy plants in containers should be moved inside.
    - If containers are too large to move, insulate it with bubble wrap or water heater insulation and a generous layer of mulch.
    - Remove and Store Tender Bulbs
      - Dig out bulbs like cannas, dahlias, gladiolus, and caladiums.
      - Let them dry out in the sun before storing.
      - Remove the foliage and pack them in peat moss or vermiculite then store them in a cool dry place for the winter.
  - Spring Blooming Bulbs
    - After removing annuals and amending the soil, wait until the soil temperature is 55 degrees or below to plant bulbs.
    - Plant short lived bulbs like tulips and hyacinths in areas where you had annuals.
    - Go shopping! There are hundreds of perennial bulbs that wake up sleepy gardens from late winter to late spring. Plant them throughout shrub and perennial beds.
    - Some Favorite Perennial Bulbs
 

• Alliums	• Ipheion
• Bellevalia	• Iris-Dutch
• Bulbocodium	• Iris-Dwarf
• Camassia	• Leucojum
• Chionodoxa	• Lillium
• Colchicum	• Muscari
• Crocus-Fall	• Narcissus/Daffodils (early, mid, late, & dwarf)
• Crocus-Spring	• Puschkinia
• Eranthis	• Scilla
• Erythronium	• Tulipa
• Fritillaria	
• Galanthus	
• Hyacinthoides	
- **Autumn Maintenance Tasks**
  - Pull weeds and tree seedlings.
  - Over-seed lawn areas.
  - Edge perennial beds.
  - Drain water hoses and store them inside.
  - Clean, sharpen, and oil (boiled linseed oil) and store your tools.
  - Empty your compost bin.

- Prune deadwood on deciduous shrubs before they shed their leaves.
- **Lawns and Soil**
  - Fall is the best time to fertilize cool season lawn grasses.
  - Use a fertilizer with a nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium ratio of about 2-1-1 or 4-1-2 such as 20-10-10 or 20-5-10. Nitrogen should be in a slow-release form.
  - Improve soils by digging and adding organic amendments.
  - Rake leaves out of beds and lawns. Shred and reuse them as mulch.
  - If you have English ivy growing on trees, now is the time to prune it to breast or ladder height and prune off any flowers or fruit. Groundcover ivy should be pruned to keep it from climbing trees, shrubs, or structures.
- **Evergreen Plants**
  - Protect exposed marginally hardy plants with a windscreen.
  - Drive stakes around the plant and surround it with burlap.
  - You may want to tie boxwood/arborvitae with twine to prevent snow damage.
  - Spray plants with an anti-desiccant to create a waxy coating on the leaves.
  - Usually a mid-December spray will protect it through January and February.
- **Watering and Mulching**
  - Water the garden thoroughly before the ground freezes, especially evergreen plants because they transpire throughout the winter.
  - Wait until the ground has slightly frozen to apply mulch.
  - Keep mulch off of perennial crowns and away from woody stems and trunks.
  - Use mulch that is loose and high in organic matter, dried shredded leaves, pine needles, or shredded pine bark mulch.
- **References**
  - [University of Maryland, Maryland Cooperative Extension, Home and Garden Information Center](#)
  - [Botanical Interests Online](#)
  - [Flower & Garden Magazine](#)
  - [Brent and Becky's Bulbs](#)
  - [www.thehelpfulgardener.com](http://www.thehelpfulgardener.com)
  - [www.perennials.com](http://www.perennials.com)