

A GARDENERS WORK IS NEVER DONE

Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardener

You may be thinking that with the onset of winter, your garden work is done. Think again! Did you prune trees and shrubs yet? Mulch perennials? Dig up tender plants and store them for next spring? To help you, the University of Maryland (UMD) lists several outdoor garden tasks for November on its extension web site (<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/november-tips-tasks>).

Prune

While spring bloomers should have been pruned very soon after they finished blooming, fall is the time to prune summer-blooming shrubs, dormant shade trees, and do other trimming as needed. UMD recommends that you prune back to the branch collar (swollen area on the trunk or larger branch from which you are trimming other branches/twigs). To reduce the overall height of your tree, don't give it a "crewcut"; rather, prune "entire branches at their point of origin," says UMD. If possible, pile pruned branches in a corner of your yard as a winter shelter for birds, insects, and other creatures. Chip up any branches destined for compost.

Protect

After the first hard frost, mulch tender perennials to protect them from heaving out of the soil because of the alternate freezing and thawing of soil. UMD notes that "mulch helps moderate temperature fluctuations, reducing" the heaving.

Shred the leaves from your trees with a mulching mower or a leaf shredder, then let them decompose naturally on the lawn, in your garden beds, or on your compost pile. Do NOT make a "volcano" of mulch around your trees, as that encourages insects and bacteria to invade the trees. UMD says covering the beds with "shredded leaves [can] minimize the risk of soil erosion and nutrient run-off. They can be tilled into the garden in spring or left in place as a mulch between rows of vegetables."

If you have a pond, remove leaves and cover the pond with screening. Otherwise, the "decomposing leaves will produce gasses that can sicken or kill fish when trapped under a layer of ice."

Along with traditional mulch and shredded leaves, you may want to layer organic matter, such as composted, aged horse, cow, sheep, or chicken manure, into your garden beds.

Some popular plants, such as azalea, rhododendrons, camellias, boxwood, cherry laurel, or magnolias, are at their northernmost limits in our region and need protection from our bitter winter winds, especially when these plants are young. Consider the plant's placement in your garden—is it in a microclimate or a protected area? If not, UMD recommends a fence of staked burlap or plastic around the individual plant or along a row of plants. I've tried both burlap and plastic and found that burlap holds up better in winter winds.

Depending on where you live, you may also need to protect plants from deer damage with deer repellants, deer netting, or fencing.

Store

Many summer-blooming bulbs and tubers, including cannas, dahlias, gladioli, caladiums, and tuberous begonias, are too tender to survive our winters. Instead, dig them up and cut stems/leaves back almost to the bulb (but keep a 4-6" stem on cannas and dahlias). Let the bulbs dry out for one to three weeks, according to UMD's web site. Make sure you label plant types and colors. Store the dried plants in paper or mesh bags, cardboard boxes, or even in nylon stockings, layered with peat moss, perlite, vermiculite, or newspaper, in a cool, dry place (at 40-50°F), such as your basement, until spring. Check them periodically and discard any shriveled or decayed bulbs onto your compost pile.

Avoid Fertilizing or Seeding Now

Grass seed spread now is unlikely to survive the winter, as the seed does not have enough time to develop a good root system. Rather, sow seed in early spring. In addition, the Maryland Lawn Fertilizer Law requires that Maryland homeowners NOT apply fertilizer to their lawns between November 15th and March 1st.

Even with all those tasks out of the way, you'll no doubt find more things that need your attention in the coming months. After all, a gardener's work is never done. But perhaps you can take time to sit down with a cup of tea or a glass of wine, gaze out the window at your winter landscape, and imagine spring projects, a place for just one more tree, a new vegetable or flower bed...



Canna lilies are very tender perennials, and in our region, must be dug up each fall, usually after the first hard frost. Shown above is a one-year-old canna with dirt still clinging to the roots and rhizome or tuber. Planted again in mid- to late spring next year, it will probably grow several more tubers underground that can be divided into new plants next fall.



Dirt has been shaken off the canna lily, above, and the tubers allowed to dry in the sun for a few days before the stalks were cut off about 6 inches above the tuber. The tuber will be loosely wrapped in newspaper and stored in a cardboard box with more of its kind in the basement. If you have various colored cannas, be sure to mark the different colors. When replanting in the spring, plant with roots down, eyes or beginnings of new growth up.
Photos by Maritta Perry Grau, Master Gardener.

Check our website for upcoming seminars at <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening>, or call us at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596).

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.

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