

## Preparing for next year's gardens

### Get a soil test!

### Walk around and make notes:

1. What did you do different this year that worked well?
2. What did you do that didn't work well?
3. What plants need to be divided in the spring?
4. What plants need to be moved in the spring?
5. What plants could you add next year to improve winter interest?

### Clean-up:

1. Remove all diseased plant material.
2. **DO NOT** compost diseased material.
3. **DO** compost health annuals, vegetables, and leaves.
4. If you want to use leaves as winter mulch for your perennials and shrubs, it is best to shred them either with a lawn mower or a shredder if you have one.
5. Oak leaves and pine needles are great mulch for acid loving plants such as rhododendrons, hydrangeas, azaleas and blueberries.
6. **"To Clean-Up or Not To Clean-Up"** dead perennial plant materials. Answer: It's all up to you. Late fall or early spring –it doesn't matter. Do it when you have time. Consider leaving materials that adds winter interest to your garden, such as ornamental grasses and large sedums. Also consider leaving seed heads that the birds will enjoy gleaning such as coneflower, rudbeckia, gaillardia and sunflowers.
7. Remove dead branches on shrubs, but **DO NOT** prune healthy wood as it will stimulate plant growth that doesn't have time to harden off.

### Add organic material and compost to gardens:

1. Amend the soil with natural organic materials such as compost, manure, blood meal, bone meal, cottonseed meal, greensand etc. Organic amendments are a great way to improve the long term health of your soil. By adding them in the fall, they have time to break down into a form that plants can use, just in time for spring.
2. Adding peat will improve the water holding capacity of sandy soils.

### **To till or not to till-what literature says:**

1. Tilling hard soils in fall and leaving the ground uneven can help make it lighter.
2. Tilling in fall can bring up grubs and other over wintering insects to be gobbled up by birds.
3. Tilling in fall can bury weeds and weed seeds.

**Dig up non-hardy bulbs such as cannas and dahlias.** Dry them in the sun and store in dry sawdust, perlite, or vermiculite in a cool dry place until planting next spring.

**Plant bulbs for spring interest.** Add bone meal to hole, place bulbs and cover with soil. If critters tend to dig up your bulbs, after planting sprinkle the hole with cayenne pepper and then add the rest of the soil.

**Put tree wraps on any trees less than two years old.** This prevents rabbits, mice and voles from girdling and killing the young trees.

**To protect roses and other shrubs, wait until after the ground freezes to apply mulch if rodents are a problem.** You can build wire cylinders and fill them with leaves.

**Wrap evergreens with burlap to protect them from winter dehydration and hungry deer.**

### **Winterize containers:**

1. Containers with annual flowers and vegetables should be emptied, cleaned and stored to prevent winter damage.
2. Containers with hardy perennials or small shrubs can be buried in their pots or wrapped with bubble wrap, mulched and stored in a barn or garage.
3. If you have taken advantage of year-end sales and have perennials that you are not sure where to plant, dig a trench in your vegetable garden and plant in their pots until next spring.

**Rake up leaves and make leaf mold.**

1. Leaf mold helps build healthy soil in several ways. When mixed into poor soil, it improves soil texture. The coarse organic material creates air spaces in the soil, making it easier for roots to penetrate.
2. Leaf mold also improves the soil's ability to absorb moisture and keep it available longer for plant roots.
3. As leaves continue to decompose, they improve the soil's fertility by creating a population of active microbes.
4. Leaves are a favorite food of earthworms, which convert the leaves into nutrient-rich castings that are distributed throughout the soil.
5. Used as mulch, leaf mold discourages weed growth and holds in moisture.
6. Make a wire cylinder to hold the leaves and keep them from blowing around. A few stakes may be necessary to keep the filled cylinder upright during winds.
7. **DO NOT** use diseased leaves such as maples leaves with tar spot virus.

#### **Clean and store tools:**

1. Remove dirt, sharpen and oil tools. This is also a great time of year to find replacements on sale.
2. Drain garden hoses, coil and store in a protected place so they won't freeze and crack.
3. Run your lawnmower until it is out of gas.
4. Removing the mower battery and storing it where it won't freeze will prolong its life.

#### **Store yard art:**

1. Cement birdbaths and statues can absorb moisture and crack when it freezes.
2. Non-cement art will also break down and paint can crack in freezing temperatures.

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