



Preparing Your Garden for Winter

Rachel Burrows

Peterborough and Area Master Gardeners

Sadly it is time to start thinking about preparing your garden for winter. The weather may be lovely and the garden still looking good, but we have to start thinking about next year's garden. After such a wet and cool summer we will all need to be especially vigilant when putting our gardens to bed. There has been a lot of fungus and mould on many plants particularly roses. Black spot has been rampant and hard to control. This has been the first summer since Ontario banned chemical herbicides and pesticides. Therefore good cultural control has become increasingly crucial if we are to control plant diseases such as black spot and powdery mildew. It is so important to pick up and destroy any fallen rose and perennial leaves that are diseased in any way. Do not put them in your home composter as the temperature does not get high enough to destroy the spores.

Good air circulation is a must and crowded flower beds contribute to powdery mildew. The fall is a great time to dig and divide overcrowded perennial. After a few years plants often get too big for their allotted space. The middle of the plant becomes hard and woody and will not produce as many flowers. Cut back the stems, dig up the whole clump, place on an old tarp or newspapers, hose down the roots so that you can see what to cut away. Discard that overgrown centre and replant several smaller pieces. It is a good idea to put some slow acting bone meal or blood and bone meal in the planting hole, water well and press in firmly. It is also a good idea to place a name marker by the plant so that you don't dig it up by mistake in the spring.

Re-evaluate all your plants in this way... Is that tall plant blocking the view and would it be better in another place? Has one plant been unhappy in a particular site? Would it do better if you moved it? The soil is warm in September and the plants have a good couple of months to get their roots well established before freeze up. My own garden is now 4 years old and several plants have grown too large and I have a lot of splitting to do this fall. Friends and neighbours are usually delighted to receive gifts of healthy plants. Just make sure that there is no disease present and that they know what the plant is and where it will do well. Many nurseries have

specials on in the fall as they do want to carry over potted stock. This is often a great time to buy that special plant or fill up empty spaces in your garden.

I cut back most of my perennials to about 4 inches in late fall and clean up all round the plant. This leaves enough stalk to catch the snow to help protect the crowns. Some plants such as coneflowers, sedums and grasses, I leave as the birds enjoy the seeds and they look attractive in the snow.

Tomatoes have been a bit of a problem this year with a lot of tomato wilt and blight. It is extremely important to clear up all the dead leaves. I prefer not to put the tomato plants in my compost bin as I always end up with hundreds of little tomato plants when I spread the newly made compost. If at all possible plan to plant the tomatoes in a different area of the garden next year... Wilt spores can easily overwinter and start the cycle again next year.

Fall is a great time to overseed your lawn and to repair any bare patches. For the last cutting of the season you can set your mower blades a little lower than normal as this will help to prevent snow mould. Chop up any fallen leaves with the mower as this will help fertilize the lawn. Do not let them mat on the grass.

All your pots and containers should be emptied and cleaned with a dilute solution of bleach and water. This should kill any bugs or diseases. Store them in a shed or garage once they are dry. Don't forget to empty your rain barrels before the water freezes. After you have thoroughly watered your evergreens, disconnect and drain your hoses.

You may want to pot up some herbs and bring them into the kitchen for winter use. Any plants that are brought indoors should be carefully inspected for bugs and disease. Discard any that are diseased and spray all others with a soap and water solution such as Safers. You do not want to spread insects to your indoor plants. I like to get my plants accustomed to lower light levels by bringing them into the garage first. This also gives me time to really inspect and/or repot at my leisure. Many plants such as geraniums and begonias can be successfully overwintered in a cool spot indoors.

Once frost has blackened your dahlias, trim back to 6 inches. Lift and clean off the soil. Place them upside down in a frost free place to dry out. Later label the clumps, and pack them in boxes of vermiculate, perlite or peat. Store in a cool, frost-free place. Gladioli can be treated in a similar manner.

Strong winter winds may rock taller roses and loosen their roots making them more vulnerable to cold damage. To help prevent this, prune back any overlong shots. It is a good idea to keep some garden soil in a shed or garage so that you can use this to mound up your roses. Once the ground has frozen, mound up the soil around the crown to a depth of 5 inches. You can also use rose collars to help protect the crowns. If done too early, mice may be tempted to find shelter and chew on the rose branches. Mulch around newly planted shrubs and plants.

Bulbs are coming into the garden centres now and there is a wonderful variety. Read the instructions carefully regarding the best planting site and depth and time to plant. Generally speaking bulbs should be planted with 3 to 5 times their own depth of soil above them and 2 to 3 bulb widths apart. Plant in clumps of uneven numbers and put some bone meal or bulb booster in the bottom of each hole. Insert the bulbs, replace soil and firm gently so that there are no air spaces round the bulbs. Give them a good watering and lightly mulch. They will give you enormous pleasure early next spring. Make sure that you put in markers as I have often dug up bulbs when forking over my garden in the spring.

A little extra work in the fall will pay huge dividends all next year.

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