

Putting your Garden to Bed for Winter

As the weather turns colder, the days shorter, and the growing season ends, it is important to prepare your existing plants, shrubs, trees, and lawn for the winter months ahead. It is also the perfect time to prepare your garden soil for next season's planting. As always, weed any part of your garden to discourage even the hardiest weeds from continuing to grow and seed during the winter months.

Perennials

- Remove any leaves, weeds, or other debris from around the base of your plants.
- Cut back any damaged plants and remove all diseased plants or plant parts.
- For larger perennials, consider digging up and dividing the hardiest ones.
- While most perennials will not require mulch/compost, apply a layer of mulch to newly planted and tender plants late in the fall to protect during the first winter.

Roses

- Clean the ground around your roses from all fallen leaves and debris.
- Remove diseased leaves but leave flowers on the plant to encourage dormancy.
- Do NOT fertilize in the fall.
- Pruning should be kept to a minimum.

Trees and Shrubs

- Insulate the roots of shrubs and newly planted trees with a 4" layer of mulch. Crushed leaves, straw, and compost are good options.
- Remove mulch at the first sign of spring growth.
- Prune any diseased twigs/branches as the leaves drop in the fall. Reserve most pruning for early spring.

Lawn

- Mow your lawn to 1 – 1.5" to prepare for aeration.
- Aerate. This is best done when the soil is moist. Do not aerate with overly wet soil.
- Add compost or fertilizer.
- Overseed in early fall to allow enough time for seed germination.
- Once the new seed has grown to 3" or taller, mow again to 1.5" for the winter.
- Fall is a great time to add lime to your lawn. Fall rain and winter snow will change the pH level of your soil making it overly acidic and more attractive to weeds and moss. Adding lime keeps your acidic levels normal and promotes healthy growth as your grass comes out of dormancy next spring.

Irrigation Systems

- Remove all hoses and store them out of the weather to maintain the hose's longevity. Fluctuation of outdoor temperatures will cause hoses to crack and become weak if left outside.
- If your irrigation system has timers with batteries, remove the batteries and store them until spring.
- If you do nothing else, make sure to turn your irrigations systems off once the fall rain begins.

Fountains and Birdbaths

- If your fountain is small, it's best to unplug and drain it. Stow in a dry garden shed. You can also cover a small fountain but drain water beforehand. Stow the water pumps in a shed / garage.
- If you have large fountains, you will need to maintain the water level and fill as necessary to keep water flowing, even when freezing.
- Small birdbaths will typically need to be turned upside down since heavy freezing, etc. will damage the finish as the birdbath will collect water that expands as ice forms.
- The use of a birdbath heater is also an option.
- Typically, in the PNW, extreme freezing and cold isn't prevalent, so as long as the weather is temperate, leaving your birdbath outdoors is also an option, but make sure to drain the birdbath and turn it upside down if extreme cold is pending.

Preparing your garden soils

As you begin to remove annuals, vegetables, and other expired plant materials from your garden beds, don't throw them away. This debris will add and replace nutrients in the soil all fall and winter and will prepare your garden bed soil for planting in the Spring.

- Cut your plants at the base. Do not pull the dead plant's roots from the ground. The root system will naturally decompose and add nutrients back into your soil.
- Chop up any cut plant debris into 1-2" pieces. This can be done with pruners or a shovel. Discard any diseased plants.
- Add soil amendments / manure in the fall.
- Mix the chopped plant debris and the soil amendments into the existing soil using a rake.
- Sow a cover crop over areas of expansive soil such as clover, arugula, and legumes. If you don't want to do all of these, then cover with a mixture of straw, leaves, clippings, or compost.
- Cover and insulate your soil with crushed leaves or straw.