

# Preparing for **winter**



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**Q**uestion: Recently we've had some freezing temperatures already and I'm concerned about some of my outside plants. What should I be doing to prepare them for winter?

**A**nswer: Fall is a great time to get your yard and garden prepared for the cold winter season. Not only should you consider protecting your perennials and container plants from frost damage, but there's a lot to be done to clean up gardens and protect garden soil this time of year.

Non-native plants may need more protection from cold than natives, so insulate such tender perennials like roses, clematis, salvia, canna, agapanthus and dahlias with 2-3 inches of mulch, compost or leaves.

Leave a few inches of space around the base of the plant to deter voles and field mice that like to feed on the bark of your plants. The mulch will decompose over time, feeding your soil, thanks to the microorganisms in the organic matter.

Cover any bare soil with mulch or consider planting a cover crop to prevent winter rains from compacting the soil and leaching out any nutrients.

For potted plants, pull them into an unheated garage, basement, greenhouse or cold frame since they are more susceptible to freezing temperatures. If you have no such shelter, cover them with old blankets or sheets, burlap, row cover or a sheet of plastic — even wrapping the pot in bubble wrap will afford protection.

Don't leave hanging pots up; place them on the ground and cover them if left outside.

After a freeze or snow event, avoid walking on the lawn as it can break the leaf tissue and damage the grass if it's frozen. Lawns in the winter can benefit from a fall application of lime every few years if the pH of the soil is below six. Now is also the time to apply a slow-release fertilizer to your lawn to help it recover from our long hot summer, especially if you let your lawn dry out.

Generally, don't water your outdoor plants in winter. But shrubs growing beneath the house eaves can be susceptible to drought damage, so water them deeply every six to eight weeks, but only when the air temperature is above freezing, and early in the day.

Other preparations you should make to get ready for winter is to



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Tender perennials like roses, clematis, salvia, canna, agapanthus and dahlias need added protection from cold and frost.

clean things up by removing all spent vegetables and uprooting annuals. Remove any dead plant debris to reduce the amount of diseases and insects that overwinter and reappear next year.

Perennials like ornamental grasses, coneflower, sedum and black-eyed Susan can be left alone as they provide birds with seeds in winter. Gather up any fruit still hanging in trees or rotting on the ground, also raking leaves under orchard trees, disposing in the landfill to minimize diseases and pests like apple scab and codling moth.

Leaves serve as an awesome (and free) mulch. They can be spread around the vegetable garden and shrubs. Leaves break down and feed the worms and other beneficials, but they can attract slugs as well, so keep them off of slug favorites like hostas.

Examine all your perennials for any signs of disease such as spotted leaves or rotting stems. Either apply a treatment, prune the affected branch or remove the plant before the disease spreads to nearby healthy plants.

As far as pruning shrubs and trees, reserve that chore for January and February when plants are dormant.

Fall is a great time to divide perennials like irises and daylilies. Grab a garden fork or spade and divide them up, replanting them elsewhere or giving them to your friends.

Get serious about removing weeds during the fall so you lessen their populations before they reappear in earnest in the spring.

Don't forget to do maintenance



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Cover crops have the potential to increase soil organic matter and fertility, reduce erosion, improve soil structure, promote water infiltration and limit pest and disease outbreaks.

on your garden tools before putting them away. Keep them clean as you go: wash and dry them, sharpen and use some WD-40 on any moving parts. Rub linseed oil on the wooden handles so they don't dry out and crack.

After you've mowed the lawn for the last time, empty the lawnmower of gas, change the oil, spark plugs and air filter so it's all ready for spring.

Finally, it's wise to keep a garden journal. Now is the time to review what flourished and what didn't in your garden this last summer, what varieties did well and what you might want to do or add to your landscape next year. Mark the location

of your vegetables in your journal so you don't forget when it's time to rotate your crops at planting in the spring.

With a bit of effort and planning, your garden should be ready to face the coming cold season and you'll have a head start on a thriving garden come springtime.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*