

Use winter wisely



Winter is a good time to do some necessary cleaning around your garden

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Trimming and pruning are examples of winter gardening chores that can help prevent planting problems come springtime.

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Question: A couple, new to our area, came into the Plant Clinic this month and asked, “What types of gardening tasks should we be doing in the winter months?”

Winter is a great time to do some necessary cleaning in and around your garden and landscape.

In the landscape, it is a great time to rake up leaf debris. Many people wait until early spring to clean up the leaf and plant debris in their landscapes and gardens, but in many cases, waiting too long can allow fungal spores and insects to overwinter in the debris beneath your plants, causing problems later.

Winter is a good time to plant and transplant trees and shrubs, and prune or cut back many types of plants. Dead stems and leaves of perennial plants and ornamental grasses should be cut down before new growth begins.

Trimming back perennials and grasses can be done any time during winter but should be completed by early March since new leaves often begin to emerge as spring approaches.

Winter is prime time to trim back your roses. Roses are always a little tricky when it comes to pruning. Experts say you should cut back your roses to 18 inches after the first freeze.

Summer flowering shrubs such as beautyberry, butterfly bush and summer blooming spirea can be pruned in February. Cutting these shrubs back hard to a low framework 1 foot to 2 feet high will encourage lots of new growth and heavy flowering for the summer.

Vitex and crape myrtles can also be pruned lightly now by trimming off seed heads and removing crossing branches, but avoid hacking these trees back to bare trunks. Pruning should be done to remove diseased, damaged and overlapping or rubbing branches.

As we get into winter, the threat of damage to trees and shrubs from snow and ice can be a problem. When snow piles up on evergreens, try to gently brush it off. Don’t shake branches, as this may cause them to break. If the snow is frozen on the branch and will not brush off easily, it is best to let it melt naturally to avoid damage to the

tree or shrub.

If tree limbs break due to the weight of ice or snow, it is advisable to have the broken limbs removed as soon as the weather permits. Hanging branches can be a danger. Also, the tree will be able to heal the wound better in the spring if the wound has clean edges instead of ragged tears.

Winter is not the time to prune spring-blooming shrubs like forsythia, azaleas, Indian hawthorn, camellias and most hydrangeas. Pruning these plants now will remove this spring’s flowers.

To avoid disrupting the spring flower show, wait to prune these shrubs after they finish blooming. Exceptions are the new ever-blooming types of hydrangeas like Endless Summer, which will bloom even if cut back, though flowering will be delayed until mid-summer.

The old-fashioned Pee Gee hydrangea and newer selections of *Hydrangea paniculata* such as “Limelight” and “Pink Diamond” should be cut back in February. Unlike other hydrangeas, these hydrangeas only produce blooms on new growth. Annual pruning will help keep them compact and free flowering.

Some vegetables can be grown outdoors in the winter. By mid-February, seeds of cool season vegetables like kale, garden peas, snow peas, spinach, radish, mustard and turnips can be sown directly in the garden.

Set out transplants of broccoli, lettuce, cabbage, Swiss chard, parsley and cilantro in February and early March. This is also the time to plant seed potatoes, which will be ready to dig in May and June.

Once you finish all the clean-up in your garden and landscape, do not forget to start planning for the spring. Winter is a nice time to draw out a map of your garden to find holes where you can place new specimens and try fun things.

Think of the seasonality of your garden and landscape. Is there something flowering throughout the growing season? Can you place a tree or shrub for winter interest? Should you fill in spaces with some annuals in the spring? These are all questions to ask yourself so you can be ready when the warm weather is upon us.

If you order seeds from a



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Winter is a good time to prune ornamental grasses before new growth begins.



PIXABAY PHOTO

Once clean-up is done, consider making gardening and landscaping plans for the spring.

catalog, get your order in by the end of January. Early orders help ensure that you get the seeds you want and that you have them in time to start them indoors for out planting in the spring.

Question: Where can I get my garden soil tested?

Soil testing is an important item on the gardening to-do list in winter.

A good gardener wants to know as much about their soil as possible. The only sure way to find out what your soil needs is to test it. The Douglas County Master Gardeners at the Douglas County OSU Extension Office

offer soil testing for \$20 per sample.

The results will tell you what additional soil amendments, besides a good dose of compost, should be added. The test includes information on soil texture, humus concentration, pH, as well as levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium and magnesium. You will also receive recommendations for improving your soil.

Taking a soil sample is the first step. You will need a clean trowel or spade. Dig a small hole, removing the soil from about 6 inches down. Take a thin slice from the straight side of the

hole. Take about six different samples from different places spread across your garden. Mix all the samples together. It is best if the soil is air-dried. At least two cups of dry soil is required for the test.

Bring your soil sample in a clean container to the Douglas County OSU Extension Office. A soil test can be completed in just a couple of weeks.

Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461.