

Preparing your plants for winter

DEBBY FINLEY
Master Gardener

Question: The daylight hours are getting shorter and the weather cooler. What should I be doing to help my garden get ready for winter and prepare for a successful spring?

Answer: After the rush of spring planting and the frenzy of the summer harvest, it's tempting to want to take it easy and just enjoy your produce. However, the steps you take now – to examine your garden (what worked and what didn't work this season), clean up overgrown plants, remove invasive weeds, add soil amendments, divide bulbs and plan ahead – will make spring easier and more bountiful.

Winter cleaning and removing of dead plant debris reduces the amount of diseases and insects that will overwinter and reappear next year. It is important to remove weeds left behind so they do not produce seeds which can remain in the ground until conditions are favorable for germination.

Cut back the browned tops of herbaceous perennials like salvias, rudbeckias, lantana, cuphea, cannas, and others. Chop them up and throw them in the compost pile. Divide plants like iris and bulbs. Now is the time to plant daffodils, tulips and crocuses for another year's display. Examine all the perennials in your garden for signs of disease. Look for spotted leaves or rotting stems and either apply treatment, prune the branch, or remove the



Debby Finley
Guest Column

plant before the disease spreads to healthy plants in the vicinity.

Bare soil can be covered with a layer of shredded leaves. They protect the soil from erosion as well as suppress weed development over the winter. During spring and summer, the nutrients in the soil are depleted by growing plants. Fall is the best time to add soil amendments because a slow-releasing fertilizer will enhance the soil quality throughout the winter months. In the fall, don't use a fertilizer that contains high, quick-release nitrogen. Use as little nitrogen as possible, because it will cause new, tender growth to occur. High phosphorus and potassium fertilizers will help to thicken cell walls and stimulate more sugar and carbohydrate production within the plant cell walls. This fortifies and protects the plant. Consider using a 6-2-4 or 4-2-3 analysis when feeding your landscape shrubs and trees in the fall season.

Winterize your garden equipment. Cleaning and sharpening equipment, making sure soil is off shovels, hoes, rakes, and other gardening tools prevents the spread of possible soil-borne diseases. Changing oil in lawnmowers and weed eaters prevents contaminants from staying in the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BONNIE COURTER

Weeding before the winter can help ensure a successful spring-planting season.



COURTESY OF MSU.EDU

Delightful daylilies: Sharpen your shovels then divide and conquer.

engine over the winter.

It's never too early to start making your garden plans for next year. Review what flourished and what didn't in your garden this past year. Think about what you want to do or add to your landscape next year.

Browse through seed catalogs, and don't forget the need to rotate crops. Now is a prime time to get your soil tested. Call the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic for details. Preparing your garden in the fall will ensure that your soil



Some commonly used garden tools.

is healthy and ready for spring planting, giving you a head start on a thriving garden.

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at

douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 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.