

This is the time to winterize your home's yard and garden

With winter around the corner, now is the time to get your garden ready for spring.

In addition to raking the leaves and cleaning up the garden beds, this is when you need to plant tulips, daffodils and other spring bulbs. This is also the time to protect your lawn and plants from the chilly nap they will be taking over the winter. Some fertilizing and soil preparation will also save you time and extra work come spring.

Cleaning up

Cleaning up your garden not only makes it look tidier, it promotes healthy soil and thriving plants in spring.

- Rake fallen leaves from the lawn— these can smother grass as they get wet and mat down, encouraging disease and pest problems in the spring

- Sprinkle a bit of fertilizer over some of the leaves and till these into the soil to enrich it come spring

- Keep your lawn short as winter approaches to ensure it doesn't mat down

- Remove and dispose of all plant debris that has been diseased or attacked by pests— this will discourage overwintering of insect eggs and plant disease organisms

- Toss only plant debris that is disease- and pest-free into your compost

- If you haven't done so in at least five years, have your soil tested for pH and fertilizer needs. The best time to add sulphur or lime to the soil to adjust its pH is now.

Feed your lawn

Fertilizing your lawn in late fall promotes healthy root growth and builds food reserves. Although top growth has stopped, roots will keep growing at temperatures above 0 degrees Celsius.

Protect your perennials

Perennials can be damaged by severe cold and freeze/thaw cycles. Ones that you have recently planted, or that are marginally hardy in your area, need special care. In areas where temperatures drop below 0 degrees Celsius, it's not a bad idea to mulch all perennials. You may also want to wait until spring to cut them back since the dead foliage helps trap snow, protecting plants over the winter.

In late fall, cover perennials with a loose mulch of hay, straw or evergreen boughs. Leaves are not recommended because they become matted when wet and won't trap air to properly insulate the soil. Remove mulch gradually in spring as the weather warms up.

Save your shrubs

Some plants need more than root protection over the winter, while others thrive on neglect. You'll know which ones need more pampering by their appear-

ance in the spring. Foliage, for example, on some evergreens such as yew, hemlock, and rhododendrons, is prone to browning or bleaching from winter sun and windburn. Some sprays are available to coat sensitive foliage and prevent winter burn.

The following tips also help:

- Thoroughly water the soil before the ground freezes— evergreens lose moisture through their foliage all winter

- Use burlap or similar material to form an open-top barrier around sensitive shrubs that will protect them while letting air and light through

- Prop evergreen boughs against or over shrubs to protect them from wind and sun and to catch more snow.

Plant spring bulbs early

Tulip, daffodil, and other spring bulbs should be planted early in the fall to give their roots a chance to develop. Mix some bonemeal around their bases to give root growth a boost.

Look around your entrance, walkway, driveway and other outdoor areas for empty spaces where colour is needed or would be welcome from an indoor view. Plant bulbs in these areas and watch your home come alive in spring. Here are a few tips:

- Plant bulbs as soon as possible after buying
- Bulbs are planted pointed side up, three times as deep as they are high

- For the best effect, group or cluster the bulbs in various areas— group in uneven numbers of three to 15

Bring some of your garden indoors

As the cold, gray days of winter set in, you can still enjoy some of the color and pleasure of your garden by bringing a piece of it indoors.

Annuals such as geraniums and begonias and many herbs can be placed in plots and brought indoors. Be sure to take the following precautions before doing so:

- Remove any dead or yellow foliage

- Examine the plants carefully for any pests that might infest your indoor plants

- Wash the outdoor plants down with soap and water and give them a good rinse. This will get rid of dust along with spiders and other insects.

- Introduce the plants to their new indoor environment gradually— bring them in for several hours a day to start with.

- If you must move the plants indoors fast because of frost, provide a consistent source of light and place the pots on a dish of gravel mixed with water to provide steady moisture.

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