

The Art of Fall Garden Clean-up **Garden clean-up with an eye for winter beauty**

When to “winterize” the garden

Do it while the garden is still pretty and you can't bear to part with it.

Leaves beginning to fall are the first cue: Even Nature says "OK to end it!"

Aim to be done before the heaviest leaf-fall -- leaves are icing on your fall work.

Hosta is one of the early-warning devices, melted after first frost.

Start before the really heavy frosts and freezes that can make work very difficult.

If you don't cut it on a 60° weekend in glorious October, winter will sneak in!



Why not wait 'til spring when we're back in the gardening mood?

Easier to cut a fall garden - firm not mushy, organized not tangled

Cutting in fall reduces number of seeds left in the bed - fewer early spring weeds

Fall clean-up is less stressful, overall. Nothing will grow up overnight and then have to be left looking shaggy through a whole summer

So much organic material available: Fall leaves. No better amendment or blanket!

The first step - cut things down

Cutting tools: Pruners, shears, scythe, ...weed whip

Cut low and wobbly deciduous plants to the ground.

Don't cut -- or only trim -- evergreens: Thyme, candytuft, bergenia, lavender, lenten rose, coral bells, etc.

Unsure? Can cut everything to just 5-6" tall. Deciduous plants short enough to be out of the way; evergreens have enough left to make it through winter.

Leave sturdy plants of substance: Ornamental grasses such as maiden grass, blue oat grass, ravenna grass, stonecrop (*Sedum 'Autumn Joy'*), etc.

Decide for yourself about persistent fruit and seed heads: What's pretty to one is clutter to another. Leave a new plant up for the first winter or stroll others' gardens in winter to decide what looks good to *you*. Rose hips? Nice but not quite holly. Rudbeckia, pretty but seedy. Blackberry lily and globe thistle seed heads shatter, but *attract* a decoration: Birds!

Leave late-bloomers un-cut or take cut stems into the house for your vases: Aster, mums, Japanese anemone, toadlily may all be blooming

Cutting with hand pruners brings you close to plants. Note problems: weeds, pests.

Step two - rake up the debris

Get everything out of the way so you can see!

Which rake? - metal tines better than bamboo.

Please consider a shredder and/or compost facility for all the debris.

Step three is optional - spread fertilizer

Spread complete low-nitrogen or balanced slow-release fertilizer around your bed.

For each 10' x 10' area: 5 pounds of a slow release organic product like 2-2-2 Driconure, Garden Tone, Fertrell etc. (2nd choice: Four - five cups granular such as 5-10-5, 5-10-10 or 6-24-24). Either way equals 1.0 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, half the annual rate of nitrogen for perennials.

Don't worry about precision, just spread it as evenly as you can.

Brush it off the leaves of evergreens.

Fertilizer gets mixed in during the next three steps, without any deliberate effort.

Step four - clean up the edge

Edging tools - half moon edger or square, sharp spade.

A garden with a cut edge is a lost garden if the edge is not cut clean in fall. Slice straight down and lift out the sod WITH ALL INVADING ROOTS ATTACHED.

Leave the trench open over winter. Air is a good root barrier.

Install or fix edging -- to be as deep as the roots of plants you're trying to exclude.

A tip - edging stays down if installed correctly, in trench cut at right angle (90°) to plane of ground

Another tip - carpet runner works great for DEEP rooted invasive weeds. Usually we use at 9" but can be buried to full 27".

Step five - weed thoroughly

Weeding tools - a fork is best because we're most concerned now with the weeds that have escaped notice all summer, gotten big. For clay soil, a fork's a must!

With the beds cut down we can see the weeds that have been hiding all summer

Be ruthless. A weed is a plant growing where it's not wanted.

Watch for and correct trouble: Weed hot spots, drainage, compaction, sickly plants.

Fall dividing and transplanting is all a part of weeding - but when it comes to an attractive winter garden, it's important enough to rate as a separate step.

Six - divide, transplant, rearrange and extend!

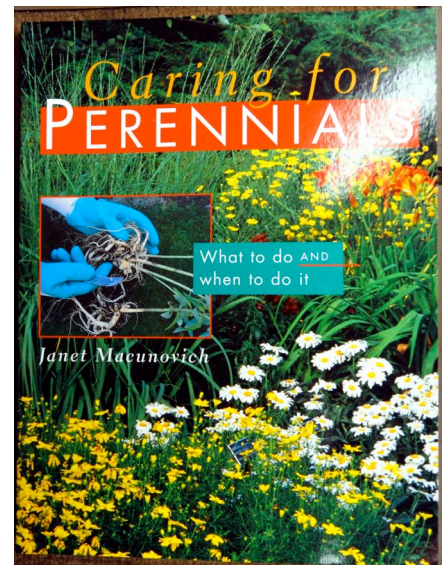
Technically, every overgrown perennial is a weed.

Sure, they're good plants, if you have the space for them. Perhaps they can thinned to reduce the spread of the clump, divisions used to start a new groundcover area. But if you reduce the clump and have no immediate use for the excess, compost it!

Clay soil? Leave the soil surface rough-n-tumble wherever you can. More, later!

Bulbs and bare root perennials are gift-wrapped presents to yourself!

Add bulbs and new plants. Think about adding bulbs to draw early season attention to the focal points you'll establish with winter interest plants.



Impart beauty to the winter garden as you put it all to bed.

Leave some sturdy stalks and all evergreens as you cut the garden down. From a favorite winter seat, take a critical look. What's left really draws the eye! Single plants look lonely. Now is the time to rearrange or add to the garden to give lone standing plants company for the winter: Tall maiden grass (*Miscanthus*) needs short company, such as juniper. Think about color, form and texture as you make these matches. Ex: Open-branching, coarse rhododendron begs for more solid mahonia or holly nearby. Place winter compositions at focal points to carry the eye around the whole scene. Three winter characters such as Koster spruce, fernleaf Japanese maple and Hinoki falsecypress make an always-pleasing triangle. Use non-plant materials as part of the winter groups.

Seven - mulch

You'll need 8-10 wheelbarrows (1 cubic yard) of organic mulch, homemade or imported, for every 200 square feet of bed. Mulch goes on like a blanket between, not over plant crowns. Make a 3-4" layer of organic mulch that protects the bare soil over winter. Decomposes to 1-2" by spring, if soil is "working" well. (If bark, use thinner layer: 1-2 inches thick.) Mulching can wait until ground freezes but not necessary, often not practical. Recommended mulches: Grass clips, shredded leaves, shredded perennials, compost, processed bark, etc. For clay, high-lignin materials such as pine bark are best; long-lasting crumb-nuclei. (Avoid raw wood except as last resort.)

Eight - sit back and enjoy. And keep on learning:

Internet searches:
Look at .edu results, first



[In The Backyard: Fall Leaf Management — University of Illinois ...](#)

Oct 27, 2008 ... There is a huge difference in oak leaves and silver maple leaves. ... and hauling to the city landscape recycling dump. ... County Director, Logan County Unit and Interim County Director, Sangamon-Menard Unit ... web.extension.illinois.edu/logan/blogs/eb107/20081027_2451.html - Cached

What About Leaves?

Jan 5, 2010 ... For those who can't reuse all of their leaves at home, the Denver Leafdrop drop-off program gives residents a chance to recycle their leaves ... www.colostate.edu/Dept/CoopExt/4dmg/Lawns/shredvls.htm - Cached

Leaf Mulch Sale - Olbrich Botanical Gardens

Olbrich also grinds large quantities of leaf mulch for use throughout the year in all ... Olbrich Botanical Gardens | 3330 Atwood Avenue, Madison, WI 53704. ... www.olbrich.org/events/leafmulch.cfm - Cached - Similar

Caring for Perennials book by Janet Macunovich, Storey Communications

Janet & Steven Give You Garden Care magazine sales support the free website & Forum www.GardenAtoZ.com

Asking About Asters 6-book CD, Janet's indexed Q&A, 1,281 problems solved

On garden forums, newsletters: Seek the science as well as the art

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In this section: **Growing Concerns 584: Fertilize in fall, first hard frost**

The most recent articles: Early Fall

Main features this season: Thoughtful fall clean-up, great garden next year

This week in our gardens: Green thumbs up, green thumbs down

Tip cuttings: One question that can't wait until you're here: Can I fertilize a perennial garden in the fall? I used to and then someone told me it was a bad idea so I stopped, but I think I heard you say you do fertilize in fall and I think my garden actually needs it. -NS-

Mentors' magic: A fall application is the single most important fertilization you can do for a lawn on a perennial garden. We hold off on nitrogen fertilizers between early August and the first fall frosts so that plants will begin to harden off in response to natural, late-summer cues of shorter days and lower nitrogen. Then when fall arrives we augment the soil's fertility by adding organic or slow release granular

The 45mph garden: Aiming for answers: Hit or miss

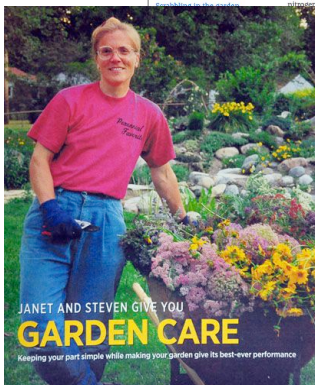
Big mistake, big lesson: A fall application is the single most important fertilization you can do for a lawn on a perennial garden. We hold off on nitrogen fertilizers between early August and the first fall frosts so that plants will begin to harden off in response to natural, late-summer cues of shorter days and lower nitrogen. Then when fall arrives we augment the soil's fertility by adding organic or slow release granular

Stumper - Why isn't that: A fall application is the single most important fertilization you can do for a lawn on a perennial garden. We hold off on nitrogen fertilizers between early August and the first fall frosts so that plants will begin to harden off in response to natural, late-summer cues of shorter days and lower nitrogen. Then when fall arrives we augment the soil's fertility by adding organic or slow release granular

Left: Organic, carbon-based fertilizers such as those made from manure, plant by-products (potatoeed meal, help, etc.) or animal by-products (bone meal, feather meal, etc.) have nitrogen in a form that does not dissolve into water. It's called water insoluble nitrogen, or "N120" on this package label. It's what we want for fall garden work -- fertilizer that releases its nutrients slowly and does not burn.

Above: Nature fertilizes in fall with leaves. Follow her lead and spread a slow release fertilizer now.

Materials such as poultry manure, dried cow manure, compost, greensand, bone meal, feather meal, and meal and sewage sludge are like fall leaves. They break down over winter to dissolve in spring just



The Art of Fall Garden Clean-up, page 3
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