



# Winterizing Your Garden

## Winterizing garden tools and equipment

Preventative maintenance not only extends the life of your gardening tools, but makes getting started in the spring a breeze.

- To clean garden tools, put warm water and a tablespoon of dishwasher detergent into a bucket. The detergent helps detach soil clumps from metal blades. When clean and dry, use a broad file to sharpen shovels and hoes for next season. Apply a light coat of oil to prevent rusting. Tighten loose screws or nuts and lubricate moving parts and springs. Repair any broken handles.
- Drain all water from hoses. Store them kink-free in a dry place on a hose reel or loosely coiled rather than hanging on a hook or nail.
- Treat your lawn mower right this winter, and it will treat you right next spring. Run the gas out of the tank, remove the spark plug, and squirt a tablespoon of oil into the cylinder head. Give the engine a turn or two to coat the cylinder walls with oil, then replace the plug. Disconnect the spark plug wire, and clean any accumulated grass from under the mower. Then store it in a dry place until spring. Consider having the blades sharpened now so you won't have to put off mowing in the spring because the blades are in the shop being sharpened.
- Clean up your garden cart or wheelbarrow and wash spreader out. Grease wheels to prevent squeaking.
- Two-cycle engines that run with a gas and oil mixture should have the oil-gas mixture removed. To do this, run the engine with the choke open until fuel runs out.
- Don't store gasoline for your mower-it deteriorates quickly. Never use old gasoline in your equipment.

## Vegetable Garden

- Plant pathogens and insects can over-winter in the vegetable garden on infected plant debris, so do a thorough cleanup and tilling of the soil in areas where you've had problems.
- Don't forget to give soil a boost by working in more compost and manure.

## Annual & Perennial Beds

Whether you cut back perennial foliage in fall is up to you. I like to leave seed heads and dried foliage for winter interest and catch the snow to help insulate my beds and to feed birds, but many gardeners prefer to leave neat beds ready for a show of spring-flowering bulbs.

- After frost has killed the annuals, pull them out and compost. Dispose of diseased plant material in the garbage.
- To clean up your beds, start cutting plants back after the leaves die back. To avoid future problems, remove and dispose of any diseased leaves in the garbage. The foliage of some perennials-delphiniums, bee balm, summer phlox and peony should be cut to ground level and removed to prevent disease problems.
- Do one last weeding and discard any weeds that have seeds on them in the garbage instead of the compost.
- Apply a 5 cm layer of winter mulch. This keeps soil temperatures more even so that perennials will be less prone to damage from freeze/thaw cycles. Use mature compost, weed-free straw or fallen leaves and spread around, not on top of your perennials. (If you shred them first, leaves will break down easily next spring, adding more organic matter to soil.)

## Roses

Many roses-hybrid teas, floribundas and grandifloras need winter protection in most parts of the country.

- Remove fallen rose leaves from around each plant to help prevent recurrence of common problems such as black spot.
- Don't cut roses back now-do it early spring. The exception is rose bushes taller than 2 metres. These may be cut to a more manageable height of a metre.
- Once the ground starts to freeze, hill or mound soil up to 15 to 20 cm around base of each plant. A rose collar, available in most garden centres, can be used to help keep soil in place. Don't use soil from around plants for hilling-bring in additional soil.

## Containers

- Empty all frost sensitive containers of plant material and potting mix-both can go into the compost.
- Clean clay pots and other frost sensitive containers and store in a dry frost-free place.

### **Bulbs of all sorts**

October is bulb *planting* time, but it's also the time to dig and store tender bulbs such as gladiolus, tuberous begonias, dahlias, canna and calla lilies.

- Dig up after frost has blackened foliage, wash soil off; leave exposed to air for a couple of weeks.
- When dry, store in vermiculite or dry peat (available at garden centres) in paper bags or cardboard boxes; over-winter in a cool, frost free place.

### **Lawn Care**

Good care in fall-clean-up, cutting and fertilizing-will give you a green lawn faster next spring.

- Keep raking leaves weekly. It's tempting to let leaves lie around until they've all fallen, but this can smother grass.
- Cut lawn one last time in late October or early November. Long grass encourages low temperature fungi a (cut to 3-4 cm is ideal).
- Give your lawn one last fertilizing around Hallowe'en in warmer parts of the country, a week or two earlier in colder regions. The latest turf grass research recommends only one or two applications of a slow-release, high nitrogen lawn fertilizer a year. The key application is in late fall when grass is still photosynthesizing but not growing actively; this encourages sugars to be stored in the roots and crown, increasing winter hardiness and promoting quick spring greening.

### **Woody Plants and Evergreens**

Shrubs that lose their leaves don't need winter protection, but some evergreens and broadleaf evergreens, plants such as rhododendrons, may need protection from harsh winter winds, snow and ice.

- If the fall has been dry, before the ground freezes hard, water all evergreens thoroughly over several weeks to help them store moisture to cope with the drying effects of harsh winter conditions.
- Add a 7-10 cm layer of wood chip mulch around the base of shrubs to protect roots and help retain moisture.
- To protect plants such as rhododendrons from exposure to winter sun and wind, hammer stakes or bamboo poles into the ground around the shrub and surround with burlap. If you prefer to leave foliage exposed, spray it with an anti-desiccant product that leaves a protective waxy film.

- I don't like to wrap evergreens in burlap. After all the point is to have some green to look at in the winter. If you wrap evergreens to protect them from salt thrown up by snow removal equipment on the road, your evergreens are poorly sited. You're better off to plant them in spots where you won't have this problem.
- Protect upright evergreens such as juniper and cedars from ice and snow damage by wrapping branches with heavy string or netting.
- Wrap bark of young trees with plastic tree guards or shelters to prevent damage from rodents and rabbits that feed on tender bark.