

Five Garden Winterizing Tips

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September 2020

Cool temperatures, shorter daylight hours- outdoor gardening season is reaching its conclusion in Klamath. On social media, new gardeners are asking about winterizing- positioning gardens for continued health and beauty over the winter months. For ornamental gardens and foundation plantings, it's time to complete a few tasks, but heavy pruning of "woodies"- trees and shrubs- is best left to late winter. Pruning now might encourage new growth to later be damaged by frost. Exceptions include dead, damaged, or diseased material- the risks of not removing these are greater than that of potentially damaged regrowth. Most fall work in the ornamental landscape is focused on the maintenance of herbaceous material.

Cutting back perennials. As perennials like Shasta daisies, rudbeckias, mums, and salvias finish blooming and stalks dry out, these should be cut back to tidy the garden. Cutting back is easier in fall when the stems are upright: winter snows mash them in all directions making removal a lengthier process. Previous wisdom has been to cut these stems back nearly to the ground: newer research suggests that hollow stemmed perennials, once cut back, can serve as nesting sites for native bees. Few bees fly in Klamath after hard frost kills everything but rabbitbrush. This technique of providing bee habitat may work better on early blooming perennials, stems of which would be available nesting material for a longer period. This topic is ripe for further research. Whether cut ground level, or at about two feet to provide pollinator habitat, cut back perennials for the winter season and remove dead leaves and stems.

Mulch. A good application of mulch helps regulate soil temperature and provides insulation to the root zone of plants. This is especially helpful for plants with lots of roots close to the soil surface. Many novice gardeners are surprised to learn that a cycle of frost/ thaw, frost/ thaw can be more damaging to plants than temperatures that get cold and stay cold. The warm/ cold cycle causes some plants to heave from the soil, can cause roots to dry out, and is detrimental to trees. A layer of 3-4 inches of natural products like bark nuggets or shredded bark is commonly recommended. Mulch should not be piled, volcano style, at deeper levels around the trunks of trees.

Dig and Divide. Once plants have been cut back and cleaned up, it's sometimes obvious that one plant has outgrown its designated location, or is large enough to make into multiple plants to fill in other garden spots. Fall is a great time to divide most perennials. Plants that have a rosette growth habit (all leaves seeming to originate from one central point) are generally not conducive to dividing, but numerous others benefit from division. Often forgotten at division time are the bulbs- often most traces of their spring beauty are gone by fall. Bulbs like tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths should be divided every three to five years by digging them up and removing "daughters" from the main bulb to be replanted separately. There's no one schedule that fits all plants and gardens, but failure to divide bulbs periodically leads to ever smaller and smaller blooms and weak plants struggling to compete with each other.

Protect tree trunks. Young and recently planted trees are especially prone to trunk damage when there are mild days and drastically colder nights. On Klamath's famously sunny days, sunny sides of tree trunks thaw differently from the shady sides, leading to cracking and splitting on the sunny side. Small cracks allow entry of bacteria, fungi, and insects, which make larger problems. Strong winds add further

damage. A variety of tree tape and plastic, coiled protectors are available. Now is the time to apply these if your tree(s) are vulnerable.

Remove weeds. They might look dead and harmless now, but the roots of perennial weeds are growing underground during winter, just like the roots of desirable plants. Tops may contain thousands of seeds, a deposit for next year's weed bank. If fall brings rain, weeds are much easier to pull. For a few stubborn taprooted weeds, fall is a good time to apply herbicide as the plant is pulling nutrients into the root for winter.

Gardening season might be winding down, but gardening-related fun isn't- the Klamath Gardening Trivia Tournament continues Friday, September 25, 7pm. This week's questions will focus on insects associated with two of Klamath's important crops- alfalfa and potato- as well as beneficial insects. Join via Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85270947600>

Meeting ID: 852 7094 7600

Second, go to www.slido.com and use event code 4642 to enter answers to the trivia questions. You do not have to be in the in the Zoom meeting to participate in the Slido trivia.