

Fall Gardening - Do's and Don'ts

We've been trained to believe that certain gardening chores must happen in the fall, or face the risk of an unproductive garden next in the following year. Indeed, some tasks are better taken on in the fall, but contrary to common belief, others can be put off or left out altogether.

Here is a list of some of the fall season do's and don'ts to help your garden thrive in the coming year.

DO clean out any annuals or dead plants in the fall if you don't want to face them in the spring.

DON'T remove dead plants if you want to maintain some vegetation in your garden over the winter. Keep in mind that they will break down over the winter providing compost for your garden. In the spring, simply turn the soil over and they will magically disappear.

DO pull existing weeds in the fall, along with diseased, insect damaged foliage, or rotten fruit or vegetables.

DO wash out your pots and store them away for next season.

DO continue to water your garden and trees until the ground starts to freeze. After our dry summer, even the trees need the extra water to give them the strength to face cold winter months.

DON'T feel the need to mulch all your plants. It does help keep the soil at an even temperature through the winter, and helps to retain moisture, but it is only really necessary for your delicate plants.

DO rake your lawn. Some feel that the leaves will decompose by next spring, so why bother. Raking helps to keep your lawn healthy by improving air circulation and prevent your grass from dying. In addition, the leaves make excellent mulch for the rest of the garden.

DON'T rake if you have only a thin layer of leaves that can be mowed into little pieces.

DO water and fertilize your lawn. Feed your grass at the end of October and it will be better equipped to face the winter months, and healthier in the new season.

DO plant spring bulbs and garlic in the fall. You'll appreciate seeing colorful crocus and daffodils popping up after a long cold winter. Planting garlic in the fall means you can harvest it next July.

DO bring in any plants that won't survive over the winter. Trim your geraniums to about 4 inches in length and store them in a dark, cool location. Shake off any dirt from the roots and dust with sulfur. Next February, repot and place in a sunny window.

DON'T fertilize grass that has been ravaged by drought. In otherwords, this summer, if your lawn was the one in the neighborhood that looked like straw - skip the fertilizer and water it instead.

DO continue to mow your lawn, leaving it about 2 1/2 inches long as winter approaches. Leaving it too long can cause snow mold which may kill your grass.

DO wash off your shovels and garden tools, and make any necessary repairs to ready them for next spring. Now is the time to sand and oil the wood handles with linseed oil. Clean the metal surfaces with a wire brush, sharpen the cutting edges, and apply oil to prevent rust.

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