KPOV – The Point

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Putting Your Garden to Bed”

October 5, 2021

After a long, very hot summer, fall is finally here. Time to get busy preparing your garden beds for winter. By taking some steps now, you can save time and money this spring. These include:

* Clean up
* Amend the soils
* Protect against winter cold and damage.

**Clean up:**

Harvest all mature crops before the first hard frost, including potatoes, squash, apples, and pears. Pick immature green tomatoes to ripen indoors or a darkened space 50 to 65 degrees. Check regularly. When they start to ripen you can place on the counter for finishing.

Dig and remove diseased plants. Bag and destroy them. Do **not** compost. Diseased leaves and branches should also be destroyed. Then, sterilize garden tools with rubbing alcohol or bleach before using on healthy plants.

Windfall apples and pears that might be harboring apple maggot or codling moth larvae should similarly be destroyed.

For raspberries and blackberries, prune out dead fruiting canes and apply mulch.

Prune evergreen trees and shrubs in fall to prevent insect damage.

All healthy foliage and vegetable crop refuse can be removed and composted or spaded back into the soil.

Cut back perennial leaves and stems once they start to die back and lose leaves. Compost or remove. Remove seed heads if you **do not** want reseeding. Collect dry seeds for those you wish to sow next year.

When frost turns the tops brown on herbaceous perennials, prune them to the ground. But with semi-herbaceous perennials, remove the dead tops and leave 3+ inches of green foliage at the base.

Cleaning up now, helps prevent pests and diseases from overwintering.

**Amend the Soil:**

After plants go dormant is a good time to amend your soil by adding compost. Compost helps improve drainage, provides insulation for the roots, adds nutrients and helps reduce weeds. Apply 3 to 4 inches of well composted garden mulch, tapering the depth to leave the crowns of plants and tree trunks **un**covered. (Covering them can lead to fungal and bacterial diseases.)

In the vegetable garden, sow cover crops now to add organic material to the soil. Caution: have a plan for processing **before** they go to seed.

Your lawn and fruit trees benefit from a fall fertilizer. Those with a higher phosphate number help root growth over winter.

**Winter Protection**:

For your perennials: Pruning stem heights down to 6 to 8 inches helps hold snow in place and insulate the base of the plant. This also allows easier application of mulch. For perennials that appreciate mulch, it is best to apply 2 – 5 inches of mulch after the ground has frozen.

To reduce wind damage, trim or stake bushy perennials. Roses should be pruned back to thirty inches or hip height.

To prevent freezing, dig and store geraniums, tuberous begonias, dahlias, and gladiolas. Tender perennials can be brought indoors before the first frost. Clean and check them for pests first.

Water your trees and perennials well before you shut off your irrigation systems. Then, remember to water them every 6– 8 weeks during winter dry spells to prevent desiccation. Water during warm spells when the ground has thawed enough to accept water and give them a good soak.

After this, you’ll be ready for gardening this spring.

For more information on this or any other gardening topic, go to our website gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at it on KPOV, The Point.

References:

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