

Autumn is here, and many are starting their annual fall yard cleanup. There is a whole list of things to do but some other things to avoid.

Trees and shrubs: Many like to prune trees and shrubs in the fall. This is not the time of year to do this because pruning delays dormancy in woody plants. They want to try to regrow their missing branches. It is always fine, though, to prune out dead and diseased limbs, or limbs that pose some sort of hazard. If you are very tempted to perform unnecessary pruning, turn your loppers over to a responsible party until at least mid-January. Additionally, do not fertilize trees and shrubs in the fall. Like pruning, fertilization also delays dormancy. Mid-March to Early April is the best time to fertilize, but only if trees and shrubs need it.

Conifers and other evergreen plants: Do not allow pines, spruce, fir and broadleaf evergreens such as boxwood go to go into winter with dry soil. Because they either keep their needles or leaves through the winter, they continuously lose water at a slow rate through the winter. If the soil is dry, needles and leaves dry out due to the water not being replaced, and turn brown by spring. Drought stress also makes them more susceptible to pests and diseases.

Lawns: In late October or Early November, mow the lawn to a height of 1 ½ - 2 inches. This keeps the lawn from laying down under a blanket of snow and helps prevent a lawn disease called snow mold. Snow mold thrives at temperatures just above freezing and in low oxygen environments. The most important lawn fertilization of the year is the late fall fertilization in late October or Early November. You do not need to purchase a special 'winterizer' fertilizer, though, if you have one it is fine. The grass will never realize if you applied 'winterizer' or not. The lawn cannot read the bag of fertilizer to know. A standard bag of 20-0-0 or whatever you have is fine.

Hard to kill weeds: Some of the hardest to kill weeds are perennials such as field bindweed (erroneously called morning glory) and white top. Like other perennial plants, they are drawing nutrients from the leaves down into the roots. If these weeds are sprayed with a weed killer, the likelihood of them being killed is much greater, because the active ingredient from the weed killer will be stored in the roots and have all winter to do its job. For grass, use a lawn safe herbicide. For other areas, use glyphosate or another systemic herbicide registered for use where you are going to spray. Unfortunately, it is not effective to use organic herbicides for this purpose because they are not systemic, and will not be absorbed into the roots.

Annuals and Perennials: Allow annuals to be killed by frost before removing them. Many will last until November. Perennials can be cut to within a few inches of the ground once their tops are killed by hard frost. Send spent annuals and perennials to green waste, if available.

Vegetable gardens: Remove warm season crops like tomatoes and peppers once they are killed back by hard frost. Utah State University Extension does not recommend leaving the spent plant in the garden over the winter. If green tomato fruit is picked before frost, it can be stored indoors at 55 degrees for several weeks. Bring out what tomatoes you will use into a warmer room. They fruit will turn red and ripen in 5 – 7 days.