

I have received several questions about fall yard care and cleanup from local residents. Here are some of the most common with answers.

- Can I leave my leaves on my lawn? My best answer is that it depends. If there are so many leaves on the lawn that you cannot see the actual grass, this is too many to leave. When snow falls, it can compress the leaves into a layer that encourages a disease called snow mold that harms the grass during the winter. The result is entire sections of the lawn will be brown when the snow melts off in the spring. If there are a few leaves per square foot on the lawn, these can be left in place or mowed into the lawn with a mulching mower.
- What should I do with my leaves after I collect them? I prefer to mow my leaves on the lawn first. I will then either leaf blow them into a pile or collect them with my mower. This reduces their size and makes it easier to till them into the soil. I personally will put 3 – 4 inches of chopped leaves into my flowerbeds and garden. I may or may not till them in in the fall. It is fine to let them sit until spring. If I cannot use them, I will bag them and send them to green waste or put word out on social that I have free bagged leaves. Someone in the neighbor usually picks them up.
- I heard tilling the soil is bad for it. Should I actually till? Especially if you have a clay or loamy soil, over tilling can be harmful by breaking down the soil structure or what is sometimes referred to as breaking down soil tilth. Healthy soils have around 50% of their volume filled with pores that hold water and air. The pore spaces are ruined by too much tilling, making it more difficult for plants to be healthy in over tilled soil. Utah State University soil scientists say to limit tilling to once or twice annually. And so, it is fine to till but on a very limited basis.
- When should I start pruning my trees and shrubs in the fall? The short answer is that you do not prune woody plants in the fall. The only exception is dead or diseased branches and branches that pose a safety hazard. These should be pruned as soon as they are found. The time to prune shade trees is in mid-January. Apple and pears trees are pruned in mid-February and stone fruits, such as peaches, plums and cherries, in mid-March. Most shrubs are also pruned in mid-March. The exception is spring blooming shrubs such as snowball bush, forsythia, bridal wreath and lilacs. These are pruned as soon as they are done blooming.
- Can I still apply a fall fertilization to my lawn? Yes, you can, but I would do it as soon as possible. The late fall application is actually the most important application of the year.