

Pre-Winter Preparation

Over the last few weeks, I have spent a lot of time in local canyons. The maples and many other plants have already started showing fall colors. Although I do not want summer to end, I will admit that the fall colors are always beautiful. We are lucky to live in an area so diverse, where all of our wild lands are beautiful.

Seeing the fall colors additionally reminded me it will soon be time to put the yard to bed for another year. To do so, many areas require some sort of maintenance including the vegetable garden, landscape beds and the lawn.

After the fall harvest, remove spent plants from the garden. Add non-diseased plants to the compost pile and throw away any diseased material. Hauling plants to the local green waste facility is another great option, if you do not have a compost pile.

It is additionally important that spent plants are not left in landscape beds. Remove annual flowers such as petunias and marigolds by the root after they are killed by hard frost. Cut perennials back to a few inches above the ground after foliage dies back. Like vegetables, compost these spent materials or send them to the green waste facility unless they were diseased.

If the soil in landscape beds or the garden needs improving -it usually does- late fall is the best time to do so. Apply two to three inches of some sort of organic matter such as leaves or compost and till it into the soil. Doing so in the fall allows soil microorganisms many months to break down the compost in preparation for next year's plantings. Another advantage to applying compost in the fall is that if it is too hot from excessive salts, the salts will generally leach out over the winter and early spring months.

As for the lawn, continue to mow until it stops growing. Leaving it extra shaggy in late fall encourages a disease complex called snow mold. Additionally, be sure to rake all leaves and other debris from the lawn as another preventative measure. For lawns that receive moderate to heavy traffic, apply a final application of fertilizer in early November. Grass roots absorb nitrogen and other nutrients in preparation for spring.

Trees and shrubs have different fall requirements than annuals and perennials. Since they are going dormant in the fall, do not fertilize or heavily prune these during the autumn. Both encourage new green growth and can seriously delay dormancy. If plants are not completely dormant by the time winter cold arrives, they may suffer severe damage.

Finally, another step in preparing for spring is planting bulbs such as daffodils, tulips and crocus. They will soon be available; shop early for the best selection. Bulbs can play an important part in the design of a well-planned landscape and brighten the day by being among the first spring flowers. Of the bulbs, daffodils seem to be the most deer resistant.