

## Fall Yard Care

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Now that the weather has cooled, plants in our yards will quickly show signs of going dormant. Examples include leaves changing and falling from trees and shrubs and herbaceous perennials dying to the ground. At this time of year, we traditionally clean up our yards by removing leaves, cutting back perennials, and pulling out spent annuals before snow flies.

When removing leaves from the lawn, if there are leaves here and there, it is okay to leave them. If the lawn is around 50% covered, just mow the leaves up with a mower and leave them. When the lawn is almost completely covered, they must be removed, or if left in place, they could smother the lawn under snow cover.

Leaves are not just a seasonal nuisance, they're a free resource for your garden. I like to collect them with my lawn mower, which chops them into smaller pieces. I then use them as mulch in my garden and flowerbeds, about 2 – 3 inches deep. This not only saves me money on store-bought mulch but also helps the environment by recycling natural materials. If leaves fall in areas other than the lawn, it may be okay to leave them until spring if plants are not harmed. Many beneficial insects and spiders overwinter in the fallen leaves, adding to the ecological benefits of this practice. If you cannot use leaves, many neighbors will come and get them for their yards once bagged. Advertise on social media classifieds that you are giving them away. Green waste facilities also take them.

Another common question is when to cut down perennials. The simple answer is to wait until the leaves and stems have turned brown, which is often after a hard frost. Then, cut them to within a few inches of the ground. The spent stems can be chopped with a mower and then mixed with leaves in the garden or sent to green waste. Some like to collect seed heads from spent perennials and spread the seeds in the flowerbed. Spent annuals are treated similarly to perennials but pulled from the ground. A few roots can be left behind. You can dispose of them in the same way as spent perennials. However, it's crucial to remember that if any spent perennials or annuals are diseased, throw the infected material away instead of using or composting it. This proactive approach helps prevent the spread of disease in your garden.

Many people trim trees and shrubs in the fall. However, in Utah, this should not be done. Pruning and trimming delay dormancy and encourage plants to grow new branches. We do not want this when plants should be going dormant instead. In some trees, such as peaches, fall pruning can be very damaging, to the point that it could kill trees if we get sudden drops in temperatures soon after the trees were pruned. The best time to prune shade trees is between mid-January and mid-February. Prune apples and pears in mid-February and stone fruits in mid-March. Prune most shrubs in mid-March. An exception includes spring-blooming shrubs such as lilacs and snowball bushes. These should be pruned as soon as they are done blooming.