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It's a little early to apply winter mulch to landscape plants. Not all plants need a protective layer of winter mulch, as many are fully hardy to an average Nebraska winter. But we do grow plants that require or benefit from a layer of winter mulch to survive our winters, or produce well. Some plants mulched in Nebraska include strawberries, hybrid tea and floribunda roses, chrysanthemums and other perennials hardy only to zones 5 or 6, and all fall planted perennials that have less established roots. The purpose of winter mulch is to protect plants from temperature extremes, from drying out if there is a lack of snow, and to prevent freezing and thawing of soil which can uproot newly planted or shallow rooted plants. For this reason, it is best to wait until after plants are dormant and the soil has begun to freeze, or temperatures are consistently dropping into the lower 20s overnight, before applying a winter mulch.

Feeding by voles, that's voles with a V as in victory, can girdle and kill trees and shrubs during winter. Gnow marks of voles are irregular and at different angles. Depending on the type of vole, they also create surface runway systems. While trapping with mouse traps can reduce vole populations, exclusion should be used to protect highly valued trees. Use ¼-inch hardware cloth or plastic cylinders to protect individual trees. The cylinder should be tight to the ground or buried two to six inches and extend to a height above expected snow depth. When making the cylinder, overlap the edges at least one inch and fasten securely so gaps do not form where voles can squeeze through. Habitats can be modified to also reduce for voles. Keep grass and weeds short around young trees and shrubs and do not pile mulch against tree trunks. Since voles often thrive under landscape weed barriers, it would be wise to remove these. Cannas are a large leaved, almost tropical looking plants, that are perennial but they are not winter hardy in Nebraska. These types of plants are referred to as tender perennials and must be dug in the fall and stored indoors over winter. While it has been cold enough to kill tender perennials like Dahlia and tuberous Begonias, Cannas are hardier and can still be dug for storing overwinter to preserve this plants and save money by not having to buy new ones next spring. To overwinter cannas, cut the plants back to within 4 to 6 inches of the ground a few days after a hard, killing frost. Then carefully dig up the canna clumps with a spade or garden fork. Leave a small amount of soil around the cannas. Allow them to dry for several hours in a garage or shed. Next, place canna roots in large boxes, wire crates, or mesh bags. During winter, store cannas in a cool, 40 to 50 degree Fahrenheit, and fairly dry location.

Lawns should not be fertilized after late October. At one time, it was recommended to time the final fertilization with the last mowing of the season, which often was in early November. However, new research shows nitrogen uptake is lower in late fall compared to earlier in the fall. This is because reduced water use by the plants slows nitrogen movement to turf roots, and cooler soils reduce nitrogen uptake. As a result, nitrogen is lost through processes such as leaching, especially in sand-based soils during high precipitation winters; or nitrogen sits in the soil all winter. When this happens, late fall fertilization can cause excessive early spring growth increasing mowing requirements and depleting carbohydrate stores in turfgrass plants prior to summer, stressing the lawn and leading to other issues like disease or insect problems. Hence, lawns should not be fertilized after late October in Nebraska.

Cutting back asparagus in fall is a common practice; however, allowing asparagus stems to stand all winter does provide benefits to the plants. Standing asparagus will trap snow during winter, providing moisture for the crown and roots as snow melts. When stems are left, plant food in the form of carbohydrates and sugars have time to be transported from stems into the plants' crown and can help increase spear production in spring. Allowing asparagus to stand into late winter delays spring growth, which is helpful where late spring freezes tend to damage young asparagus spears. However, if you have an older female cultivar of asparagus, such as Mary or Martha Washington, volunteer seedlings can become a problem in the garden. In this case, cutting back asparagus stems in the fall and removing as much seed as possible from the garden minimizes volunteer plants from becoming a weed problem.