

Yard and Garden – 10-31-09 – Ted Griess/ Extension Horticulture Assistant

We've all heard the saying. "A woman's work is never done." Relax. I can assure you I'm not a male chauvinist. Just ask Rita; I'm quite handy around the home. Cleaning floors, doing the dishes, dusting, laundry, washing windows, ironing and a tiny bit of baking are all familiar chores to me. Although there is a gratifying feeling when I complete any of those housework tasks, I also know the glory is short-lived. Each task will need to be repeated again and again. Thus, as the saying should go, "Housework is never done."

It's the same when it comes to yard work. To maintain a healthy and attractive landscape, one needs to repeat certain gardening chores over and over again. For example, mowing the lawn is not a one-time task. It needs to be done routinely. Other gardening chores may require a little more time before they need to be repeated, but they will need repeating.

By now, I've said my goodbyes to our vegetable garden and flower borders. Both are shriveled, ugly remnants of what was once lush green, filled with vibrant colors. Jack Frost has taken his toll. To the non-gardener, one might think the gardening season is over for 2009. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many gardening chores need to be accomplished, and some will need repeating.

Today, as I write this article, I'm experiencing muscular aches and pains. Although such could be attributed to housework, mine is the result of working in our yard. Last weekend I labored for many hours cleaning the yard. The rainy, windy, freezing weather distributed large quantities of twigs, trash and leaves. On Sunday afternoon, I deep-cleaned the yard.

Before winter fully sets in, perform the following chores.

Continue to mow the lawn until freezing temperatures kill the turf and turn it brown. Winterizing fertilizers are important for Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue. They can be applied up to the last mowing which is usually mid-to-late November. Do so, however, before the ground freezes. Nitrogen, applied at a rate of 1 to 1.5 pounds per 1000 square feet, is the nutrient most needed. With few exceptions, soils in Nebraska have adequate levels of phosphorous and potassium. While these nutrients are common in winterizing products, they are usually not needed. Select a fertilizer with a ratio of 25-5-5, with at least fifty percent slow-release nitrogen.

Rake or mow tree leaves regularly to avoid build-up on turfgrass. Fallen leaves, if allowed to cover the turf for more than four or five days, can smother and harm the grass. If mowing, pulverize the leaves using a mulching mower or make two to three passes with a regular mower. After mowing, the pulverized leaves should not cover the turf but filter into the turfgrass, so green grass blades are exposed.

Remove spent plant material from the vegetable garden and flower borders. Removal reduces the amount of disease spores and insect eggs that could cause problems next season. Compost any spent vegetation unless it's diseased.

Most perennials can be cut back to three or four inches in length. The remaining stubble helps to locate the plants next spring. Also, leaving a little vegetation insulates the plants from extreme cold by holding mulch and snow over the crown of the plant.

Laboring in my yard this past weekend — raking, lifting, pulling, mowing and fertilizing — resulted in a tidy yard once again. After I finished I momentarily reveled, but I knew that I'd be back at it in a few days, with more aches and pains resulting.

Housework, incorrectly called “Women's Work” is truly never done; it's the same when it comes to yard work ... but ... who's complaining.