

Garden Update

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Final Garden Steps of the Season

As the first frost of the season becomes imminent, look around the garden for any final tasks to tidy up the garden. Harvest any warm season crops that will be damaged by frost, including tomatoes, green beans, cucumbers, basil, and zucchini. Pumpkins, if they've begun turning orange, can be harvested from plants and will continue to ripen. Food is food, so look at those things you can still take advantage of. For instance, squash blossoms are edible and highly prized for their delicate flavor. You can harvest the blossoms for yourself or leave them in place for the pollinators to partake of that last delectable bit of nectar.

Once frost has collapsed the warm season annual plants, they can be pulled from the garden. The rule of thumb is to gauge whether a plant can be added to the compost pile based on the amount of diseased foliage. Plants with leaf spot, anthracnose, phytophthora, or a host of other foliar diseases should be buried or set out for yard waste pickup, while plants with relatively clean foliage can be composted.

For perennials like ornamental grasses and Rudbeckia, stems should be left in place over the winter to protect any native bee eggs overwintering inside hollow stems. For peonies, diseased stems should be pruned out and removed from the site to reduce overwintering pathogens. This criterion should be used for things like asparagus and rhubarb too. If asparagus stems are growing in a spiral pattern, this is an indication of the presence of asparagus beetle, a damaging pest that overwinters in the egg stage on foliage. Good sanitation means removing foliage to manage pests, resulting in fewer asparagus beetles next year.

If you've not ever planted a green manure crop on your vegetable garden space, consider doing so. The organic matter from planting vetch, radishes, or annual rye will benefit soil fertility and friability. It's a great way to protect the soil from the ravages of wind and downpours too.

Those potted perennials, trees, or shrubs you've been waiting for cooler weather to plant can be planted now. Water plants thoroughly and then mulch with wood chips or shredded bark in a 2–4-inch layer. This will delay soil temperature changes a bit, allowing plant roots a longer time to establish. Be sure to note in your garden journal what you've planted and include a date to provide more water if rainfall continues to be scarce.

Check the siding on your home for any cracks or openings. Boxelder bugs, brown marmorated stink bugs and Asian lady beetles will take advantage of openings in the siding to overwinter inside walls. Although a little more difficult to work with, use a silicone-based caulk to close openings as this doesn't shrink like latex caulk does.

Don't forget to water! Newly planted trees will need attention, followed by trees and shrubs planted within the last 5 years, evergreen trees and shrubs, established trees and shrubs outside of irrigation zones, and lastly those trees and shrubs within irrigation zones. The healthier the tree or shrub is, the more likely it can withstand drought. Drought AND mitigating factors can bring down even seemingly

healthy trees. Those factors include girdling roots, wounds on the trunk, raised beds around trees, the presence of a pest or disease problem, and mulch volcanoes.