

Pre-Winter (Nov/Dec) Checklist

Here, in checklist format, are suggestions gleaned from a number of sources. These tips for November/December gardening (though some recommendations only really apply to November) are applicable to those of us who live in Zone 7.

Trees and Shrubs

- Mulch trees and shrubs. Leave the base of the trunk bare, (no mulch volcanoes spouting trees, like you see in some commercial landscaping jobs!) then mulch out to the drip line if desired. Use woody mulch material to foster soil fungi and slowly add organic matter to the soil. You can also use gravels (they come in a variety of shapes and colors) which when placed over a landscape fabric act as a permanent mulch (unless planted on too steep a slope where they may migrate down hill due to gravity and water flow.)
- Water the soil surrounding woody plants, if fall rain is lacking, until the soil freezes.
- Prune only dead wood at this time.
- Install new plantings in November. Allow a month before hard freeze of the soil for roots to settle in.
- Provide wind protection for recently planted or marginally hardy shrubs (though with global warming many are less subject to the type of damage our winters can inflict.
- Watch fall color of your woody plants and consider adding red, purple, or yellow with future plantings.

Lawn Care

- Keep mowing at 2 to 2 1/2 inches for healthy grass. Gradually decrease the height until you reach 1 to 1.5 inches high.
- Water the lawn as needed while grass continues to grow.
- Keep leaves raked off of grass. Mulch-mow light leaf cover right into the lawn.
- Fertilizing in late Fall is one of the best times to do this task.
- Apply pelletized lime now if needed, but don't add fertilizer for at least two to three weeks after you lime or unless we have had heavy rainfall(s) of 2 to 3 (or more) of rain. Subsequently, if you add fertilizer don't add lime for at least two to three weeks after you fertilize or unless we have had heavy rainfall. The ingredients of both can react with each other and convert much of the nitrogen into N₂O otherwise known as laughing gas .
- Winterize your irrigation system if you have one.
- Hand weed tall weeds but don't bother using chemical herbicides or weed preventers.

Perennials, Annuals, Vines

- Remove dead material to the compost or trash.
- Remove durable stakes and store them for use next year.
- Last chance to collect any seeds, or leave seed heads for winter interest and winter bird feeding.
- Dig tubers of dahlias, caladiums, and other cold sensitive plants. Even if frost has killed

the tops of such plants, the tubers may be fine. Dry well, in the sun if possible, before storing in a frost free place.

- Top flower beds with finished compost before the ground freezes; mulch flowerbeds after the ground freezes. You may lightly, but do not let add a heavy (2-3 inch) of, compost or mulch cover the center of perennials and hardy plants, do not mulch iris roots.

Bulbs

- Plant tulips now before the ground freezes; snap up a last minute bargain. Tulips can be planted later than most other hardy spring flowering bulbs.
- Plant, in November, any other bulbs you've already bought but think twice on clearance on narcissus and small hardy bulbs. Their growth may lag with this late planting.

Vegetables and Small Fruits

- Clean up garden beds. Put the waste into a hot managed compost or remove to the trash or burn pile.
- Plant garlic in November.
- Strawberry beds need three to four inches of straw mulch now, for winter protection.
- Red and gold raspberries may be cut to the ground now to rejuvenate the planting.

Containers

- Empty ceramic and inexpensive terra cotta pots and let them dry for storage. They'll crack if they freeze while damp
- Clean up spent plants, empty and store pots, or use containers for small evergreens, hardy bulbs, or a seasonal display.
- Used potting soil can be composted, added to garden beds, or refreshed with a generous amount of finely chipped bark.

Rain barrels

- Before freezing weather, empty and clean barrels and their fittings and hoses. Store barrels so they don't collect rain.
- Reconfigure downspouts if needed for proper drainage while not in rain-collection mode.

Soils and Composting

- Take a soil test now, unless your area has just had massive rainfall. That rain could skew the test results.
- Apply pelletized lime now, (see caution above if you are also adding fertilizer) if needed. The lime will begin to work during winter and soil will be ready in spring.
- Build leafy composts, and save extra leaves in temporary bins or bags.