



An Alaska Gardener's Fall Checklist

HGA-00430

Precious weeks between the harvest season and hard freezes are the time to get the garden ready for winter and to begin preparing for the next growing season. Taking advantage of these weeks in the fall is one of the keys to a successful garden.

- 1. Remove crop residues from garden plots.**
Much residue can be recycled by putting it into the compost pile. Removing it also helps to prevent disease or insect pests, such as root maggots, from overwintering and returning.
- 2. Remove and store poles, trellises, and portable frames.**
Avoid the effects of winter damage and weathering. Needed repairs or refinishing can also be accomplished now. Mark perennials for spring. A marked stake can indicate location and provide information on what should be emerging next spring.
- 3. Apply mulch.**
Mulch provides a protective, insulating layer around sensitive perennials. Avoid conditions and timing that would allow rodents to overwinter in the mulch. Grass clippings and leaves do not make good mulching materials. Straw or hay are excellent mulches. Mulch conserves moisture, reduces erosion and leaching, prevents rapid temperature fluctuations, and improves soil structure after it is incorporated. Don't forget spring removal.
- 4. Surround shrub containers with insulating mulch.**
The amount of soil in containers is not sufficient to buffer the fluctuating extremes of winter weather. Other options would be to place the container into the ground or to store the plant in a sheltered location such as a crawl space or cool garage.
- 5. Till and turn heavy or compacted soils, then add organics.**
This allows faster drainage and warming in the spring. More organic material may be added next spring when the soil is prepared for planting.
- 6. Dig in a top dressing of compost for raised or deep beds.**
This increases drainage, improves physical structure, and adds nutrients. Material should be well composted to avoid introduction of weed seeds and other pests.
- 7. Put up windbreaks, fences, and protective shelters.**
Sheltering is an effective way to reduce the drying and damaging effects of winter winds on woody perennials. Fences may also be useful in preventing damage to plants by animals, winter traffic, and other harmful activity. Windbreak material may include boards, burlap or other material that will disrupt the force of the wind.
- 8. Build a compost pile.**
Select an open site with good drainage. Use finely divided material and turn the pile periodically to maintain aerobic conditions. Composting can recycle plant debris. Selected household scraps such as raw vegetables and egg shells provide nutrients when added to the soil and maintain the physical structure of garden soil.
- 9. Empty buckets, watering cans, rain barrels.**
Emptying reduces freezing damage, prevents the accumulation of debris and allows for any needed repairs or refurbishing.
- 10. Put away hoses and sprinklers.**
Drain completely. Check for cracks or other damage. Store in a location where they will not be subject to physical damage.
- 11. Store clay and terra-cotta pots out of the weather.**
Clean thoroughly if they have been used. Store in a dry location away from activities that may cause breakage.
- 12. Keep evergreen and deciduous shrubs well-watered before the ground freezes.**
Watering prevents winter desiccation. Plants can lose water even during dormancy. Watering is ineffective after the ground freezes. Insufficient moisture, frozen ground, and winter wind combined can result in drying or winter kill.
- 13. Carry out any garden expansion plans at this time.**
Fall is usually a time of decreased activity which allows opportunity for these projects. Conduct a soil test on the new garden area to determine fertility and liming requirements. This may be a good time to construct raised beds and improve the soil for their use.

14. Plant bulbs.

Soil should be well drained. Fall planting allows time for root development so that the bulb can produce and push forth leaf growth as soon as spring soil conditions allow. Mulch to prevent temperature extremes. Remove the mulch in spring to allow soil warming.

15. "Winterize" perennials.

Includes watering; pruning to remove dead, damaged or diseased parts; mulching to provide insulation over the root area; and wrapping thin bark trees to prevent damage by winter sun and rodents. Dividing and replanting some perennials may also be required.

16. Prune raspberries, currants, roses, gooseberries and other berry bushes.

Remove old non-bearing canes, thin overgrown areas, prune and remove any damaged, dead or diseased parts. Remove branches that are too close to the ground. Head back canes or branches that have grown too long. Canes may be saved for markers or supports.

17. Have frost covers ready for use on shrubs and any crops that are still in the ground.

An early frost can damage garden crops and perennials that have not had time to prepare for dormancy. Damage from a light frost can be prevented by frost covers, but a hard freeze will probably result in extensive garden damage. Some possible frost covers include plastic milk containers, newspapers, plastic sheeting, bed sheets, paper bags, fiberglass sheets or panes of glass.

18. Sharpen and repair hand tools.

Resharpener hoes to a blunt angle, about 30°. Other cutting tools can be sharpened to a finer angle, 20° to 26°. Clean off all rust and dirt and apply a protective coat of oil before storing tools for the winter.

19. Bring in soil, sand, compost and flats to use for starting seedlings later in the winter (spring).

Pasteurize starting media and screened compost by heating to 180°F for one-half hour. Avoid recontamination of pasteurized media. Store all materials in a dry location. Clean flats with a mixture of one part bleach to nine parts water if they have previously been in contact with soil.

20. Check to see that leftover and collected seeds are stored properly.

Provide a cool, dry location for maximum storage life. Conduct a germination test on leftover seeds in the spring to determine viability.

21. Change management activities for the greenhouse accordingly.

As days shorten and temperatures decrease, plant activity slows and requirements for water and nutrients diminish. After harvest is complete, remove plants from the greenhouse.

22. Index stored, frozen, and canned crops.

Make everything easy to find and maintain an inventory of what is remaining. Storage cannot maintain quality so plan to use stored produce as soon as possible.

23. Dry herbs, collect rose hips, make dried arrangements.

Herbs can be a welcome addition to winter meals. Rose hips can be made into jelly or another form for a delicious and nutritious treat. Dried arrangements will preserve your favorite flowers and plants.

24. Make Christmas gifts.

Jellies, jams and canned produce make very personal and welcome gifts. Design your own personalized labels, your thoughtfulness will be long remembered. Dried material from your garden can be used for dried wreaths and potpourri that will bring joy for many years.

For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office at 877-520-5211. This publication was originally developed in 1990 by Wayne Vandre, Extension Horticulture Specialist, and Marion Stirrup, Kodiak Gardener. Technical review by Michele Hébert in 2010.

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