

## Winter's Coming, So Get Busy In Your Garden

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 7, 2017

**Q:** What should I be doing in my garden during this winter season?

**A:** As we approach the winter solstice, trees are finally going dormant and our perennial plants are starting to die back. This past summer of seemingly endless hot days was very hard on many plants so by giving them some attention now you can help them recover for next year's growing season.

To keep plants pest- and disease-free, rake the remaining leaves and clean up plant debris around shrubs and roses. Groom herbaceous perennials that are no longer blooming by pruning them to within 4 inches or so from the ground. All these plant materials may be composted unless you have had problems with plant diseases.

This is also a good time to amend your soil after a thorough cleanup. Add finished compost and other organic amendments. Our hot summers bake organic matter out of the soil quickly, and you need to replace it at least twice a year. These additions will encourage the many soil organisms to grow and increase the soil's ability to hold air, water and nutrients, which will lead to healthier plants. If adding compost to garden beds I like to then cover with cardboard to keep out the weeds and make spring planting easier.

Hopefully you have already turned off the irrigation system or reset the timer for winter season on your sprinkler system. You should not need to water until late spring unless we have a dry spell lasting longer than two weeks. It is important to remember to water evergreens and citrus, especially young trees, during winter droughts. Because they're evergreens, they continue to respire throughout the winter. It is also important to remember to water plants in containers and pots that are under roof overhangs and may not get watered by rainfall.

Another chore is to flush any drip irrigation systems with water to clean out sediment and then drain lines to avoid or lessen the chance of breaking from winter freezing. Wrap any hose bibs or other exposed water pipes to keep from freezing.

Have a plan in place to protect plants from freezing temperatures so you are prepared when temperatures drop. Cover cloth is useful for protecting tender plants from frost damage. It may also be wise to move tender plants indoors or under overhangs to over winter. Other ways to protect trees from freezing is to string old-fashioned incandescent Christmas lights (LED lights give off no heat) on your citrus. If the temperature threatens to drop into the mid-20s or below and stay there for more than a day, surround your trees with old sheets held on with clothespins: they'll help hold in the heat from the Christmas lights.

Most trees and shrubs can be pruned now. After pruning apply horticultural oil to fruit trees to control scale, mites and aphids. Apply copper based spray on peach and nectarine trees to control peach leaf curl. Repeat at least once. Spraying in February and even March is particularly important if the tree has not budded out with flowers.

Late winter is the time of year to plant new trees and shrubs. Local nurseries usually have a good selection of bare root trees at this time. Bare root is cheaper and easier to plant.

It's time to move all your tools to a covered spot and clean and sharpen them as necessary so you will be all set to go when spring comes.

Finally, store any leftover seeds in a cool, dry place until the next planting season and label them accordingly. Start planning for next year's garden season by ordering seeds from catalogs, if they're not available locally.

*The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email [mastergardener@shastacollege.edu](mailto:mastergardener@shastacollege.edu). The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.*