



Preparing the Landscape for Winter

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Autumn is the time to think about preparing both your perennial beds and lawn for winter. Each area requires preparation in the fall to have healthy plants and lawn next spring.

First let's look at the steps for the preparation of perennial beds.

- 1. Watering** This should be done on a continuous basis until the soil freezes as noted by Sharon Yiesla, University of Illinois, horticulturist. "Keeping plants well hydrated helps to maintain a good root system for spring growth." Typically, an inch of water every week is the best amount. Once a week deep watering is far more beneficial than a sprinkling every day.
- 2. Weeding** We often neglect the weeds as we move into fall. Although weeds won't grow in the winter, they can act as a place to harbor diseases and insects. It will help reduce your plants' risks for pests and diseases in the spring.
- 3. Cutting back plants** This activity can be spread over a number of days or weeks since all perennials do not go into dormancy at the same time. Yiesla recommends cutting most perennials back to the ground, as they will re-sprout from the root system. If you choose, you can wait until early spring as some of the perennials may provide winter interest or act as insulators. Others may provide food for the birds. Whatever choice is made, the perennials will need cutting back to insure healthy spring root growth.
- 4. Mulching** Applying mulch in the fall can help insulate the garden soil. You may want to see how much mulch is left from spring

applications before adding more to the soil. Overall, 2-3 inches of mulch is sufficient. More mulch can be added after a couple of frosts as this is a signal that the soil is cooling. You want to be careful to mulch the ground around the perennials and avoid covering them with mulch to prevent excess water accumulation and rot around the plants roots.

(Source: http://extension.illinois.edu/gardenerscorner/issue_02/fall_07_05.cfm)

Secondly, let's look at the preparation of the lawn.

- 1. Fertilization** This is the single most important lawn procedure to improve lawn quality and to maintain a high quality, healthy lawn. It is important to apply the proper amount and kind of nitrogen, and to apply it at the right time of the year for growth. University research has shown that fall (August or September) or late fall (October, November or December) fertilization is ideal for home lawns (according to the OhioLine OSU fact sheet developed by John R Street and William E. Pound). The earlier date would be for Northern Ohio. The advantages of the late fall application are less disease and weed problems, better heat and drought tolerance, and grass plants that can produce more root mass and a deeper root system for spring. A more detailed chart of fertilizer grades and schedules can be found at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1191.html>.



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2. **Watering** During the hot dry periods of the summer, grass naturally turns brown and will go dormant if there is not supplemental water. This grass normally revives in the fall with favorable moisture and temperature conditions. If you choose to water, most lawns require about one inch of water every week to stay green—which means supplemental watering should be set for a least one to two hours per spot to apply one inch of water. If watered too frequently, shallow roots will develop. It is best to water weekly and deeply with one inch of water each time (if you choose to water). The best time is early morning and the worst time is evening since the lawn stays wet all night and will be prone to disease.

3. **Grass Clippings** Letting clippings return to your lawn can generate up to 25% of your lawn's fertilizer needs. Clippings do not contribute to thatch (an organic debris layer between the soil and live grass) since grass clippings are 75-85% water and decompose readily. Allowing grass clippings to return to your lawn through the fall can help support a healthy spring lawn. (Source: *Ohio University Extension Fact Sheet Lawn Care Plans HGY-1191-93*)

If you can spend some time in the fall preparing your beds and lawn, you can have a more rewarding spring of healthy growth.