

Show your **landscape** a little TLC this fall

Quick tips for winterizing your property

By Glen Curtis

With the shorter days and cooler autumn nights upon us, the gardening season draws to a close, with winter not far behind. Follow these tips and techniques and prevent problems to your lawn and landscape next spring.

Lawns: It is vital that your lawn be kept raked and reasonably leaf-free prior to the first significant snowfall. Leaves tend to mat beneath the weight of the snow, smothering the grass and seriously weakening new growth in the spring. Ensure that your lawn receives one final cut just before winter. Long grass that has been smothered encourages the development of snow mould or other diseases. Finally, apply a good quality fall fertilizer to your lawn for a strong root system, and to increase your lawn's resistance to potential winter-related diseases.

Summer flowering: Be sure to dig up and store your summer bulbs — such as gladioli, dahlias, and tuberous begonia — as they will not survive heavy frost and freezing. When they dry, keep them stored in a cool dry place until next spring when they can be re-planted.

Pruning: Fall is a great time to thin or prune overgrown bushes around your house. Cut back most perennials to approximately four inches above ground to encourage healthy spring development. Be aware that for shrubs such as lilacs and forsythias that bloom in the spring, you should prune immediately after blooming, otherwise you will actually be removing next year's flowers. Conversely, for shrubs such as hydrangeas or most spirea that bloom during the summer or fall, you can prune back in either the fall or in the early spring before new growth begins.

Evergreens: Evergreens benefit from a generous watering of the surrounding soil before the ground freezes. The more moisture the plant has available to store around its root system, the bet-



ter chance it has to withstand the dehydrating or "burning" effects caused by sub-zero winds and winter sun. Young evergreen shrubs under two years old are very susceptible to damage. Prevent this by loosely tying together the more open branches with twine or mesh. For the most vulnerable evergreens, surround them with a snow fence or wood stakes, and then secure a burlap screen around them. The burlap should have minimal contact with the plant foliage to allow for sufficient air circulation and to avoid contact burns.

Roses: Contrary to popular belief, roses should not be heavily pruned in the fall — generally no shorter than one metre. Wait until the ground has already begun to freeze before winterizing your rose bushes. Mound soil to about 15 - 20 cm around the base of the plant, covering the entire mound and shrub with a mulch of clean, dry straw, peat moss, or evergreen branches to fully protect protruding canes or branches. If desired, rose collars or Styrofoam rose cones can be purchased at your local garden centre.

With all things considered, it is perhaps ironic that one of the best forms of winter protection is the one provided by Mother Nature herself — a good dose of fresh fluffy snow to cover and insulate all your garden and plant material.

Finally, something good about winter after all. Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow! ▲

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