

Closing Down the Garden



Here's your quick reminder that now is probably the time to start thinking about closing up the garden if you haven't already done so. The cold weather is slowly trickling in, and garden production is creeping to a halt. Don't wait till the last minute to put away tools, pull out plants, and get everything ready for the [winter](#) season. Scrambling at the last minute is a pain in the neck. Trust me. I've done it. Once the snow starts to fall, every task you had planned becomes infinitely more challenging to complete. What does closing the garden entail? Here's a quick breakdown of tasks to put on your to-do list:

Pull out dead plants. Don't leave dead plant material behind. It's likely to attract pests and may even be harboring disease.

Cut back perennials (Careful. Some perennials are best pruned in the fall, while others do best when pruned in the spring).

Don't stop harvesting. There are likely still a few goodies left to pick; be it lettuce, [kale](#), or Asian greens.

Tackle any overgrown areas that are filled with weeds. If you don't do it now, you'll have to deal with it in the spring.

Tidy up accessories. Put away any decorations or delicate items sitting around your garden, deck, porch, or patio.

Disinfect. Clean your tools and store them safely away. Tidy up your [seed starting](#) equipment if you haven't already.

Mulch, mulch, mulch. Mulch tender plants and perennials before winter arrives.

Add protection. Protect your winter-hardy plants with a cold frame if you haven't done so yet. Don't forget to keep watering them!

Encourage healthy soil. Consider planting cover crops if it's still warm enough in your area.

There's still time for planting, too! Fall is the ideal planting time for a variety of flower bulbs. If you've ordered seed [garlic](#), you should be receiving it soon and planting it as soon as it arrives. Certain trees and shrubs also do best when planted in the fall.

Keep watering your plants. They ain't all dead yet and they're still thirsty!

Prep your beds. I like to mulch mine with leaves prior to the winter. This year, I've also added cardboard atop my beds to keep weeds down. I'll enjoy a bit of a blank slate when the spring comes around.

Do you have any fall garden rituals? Is there something you always forget to do? Have you learned new tricks of the trade throughout the years? Leave a comment and share your garden clean up tips!

Avoid These 5 Costly Fall Garden Mistakes



Summertime errors in gardening are usually easy to fix. Forgot to prune your tomatoes, and now the foliage is out-of-control? No problem. Just trim the excess and choose an appropriate support structure. Forgot to water for a few days? Most plants will be fine, and if not, it's likely you still have time to re-plant or re-sow.

Early in the season, mistakes are a little more challenging to handle. Didn't choose the right seed starting medium, and now your seedlings are suffering from damping off? Yikes. You'll

have to start all over again. The situation is salvageable but frustrating. Thankfully, though, errors in seed starting aren't typically expensive to remedy.

If you mess up in the fall, though. Mistakes may be costly. Here are five mistakes you don't want to make when temperatures dip and the leaves start to change:

Not storing your hose for the winter

I've accidentally forgotten my hose outside on multiple occasions. It often happens because winter sort of sneaks up on us like a ghost. One day it's pleasantly cool out, the next, we're experiencing a snowstorm of epic proportions. Leaving your hose outside when the snow starts to pile up means you'll likely have to purchase a new one next year. The cold will freeze any remaining water droplets inside, which can expand and rupture the tube. Even if you've adequately drained the accessory, freezing cold weather is enough to crack the exterior of your hose and render it useless.

Not shutting off outdoor water supply

Even if snowstorms haven't yet arrived, temperatures below zero can burst outdoor pipes and damage any outdoor water accessories, like hoses. In our household, we typically shut off the outdoor water supply in October (this weekend, actually). In our region, the season is rainy enough to support any remaining plant life, and if not, it's easy enough to hand-water the minimal number of plants still left in the garden.

Leaving dead plant matter in your garden beds

It's so easy to do, but please don't do it! Thoroughly clean up your beds to prevent pesky organisms from hiding out. You might find yourself haunted by your mistake next season. It's especially important to remove dead plants if they were diseased or infested in any way.

Tossing diseased plants in your compost

When removing dead plants, don't throw them into your compost bin. If your city has a brown bin, toss dead plants there, instead. Home compost bins just don't reach the same temperatures as large commercial piles, so they're unable to kill certain bacteria and fungi that cause disease. I like to stay on the safe side and put all my spent plants in the city compost. I'm too paranoid about pest and disease to take a chance.

Not wearing long pants and gloves while raking

I hate raking, which is why I've often cut corners when performing this task in the past. I rush through it, wearing whatever I threw on in the morning, and I often forget to don gloves. This is BAD. Don't do it. Always wear a long-sleeved shirt, pants, and gloves when cleaning up leaves. Why? Ticks love to hide out in leaf debris. I'd also suggest keeping your pets away from large piles of leaves to prevent them from picking up these disease-ridden bloodsuckers.

**Please, I Beg You. Bring in
Your Tender Potted Plants!**



Every year around this time as I walk around the neighborhood with my dogs or pass by homes on my morning runs, I see the insane amount of people who throw away potted plants. In the summer, when the weather is hot and toasty, people calmer to buy all the beautiful plants at the nursery. In the spring, baskets of flowers are popular. In the middle of the summer, people buy tropical palms and glorious ferns to hang around their backyard patios. Now, during the fall, its chrysanthemums are all the rage. Pumpkins start to appear on front porches, too.

I love seeing all this plant life around town. And I'm just as susceptible to plant sales and attractive displays of greenery. This summer, I brought a gorgeous banana plant home and found it a home on my back deck among a pretty display of string lights. With a single plant, I created a tropical atmosphere and made the space the perfect place to relax, unwind, and entertain.

Almost as soon as September rolled around, though, the

nighttime temperatures dipped considerably. Afraid that my plants (I also bought two pink-stemmed plants to adorn my patio table) would succumb to the cold, I promptly brought them inside.

I urge all plant lovers and frugal gardeners to do the same! Those beautiful heat-loving tropicals can't hack frosty temps, and while some are more tender than others, it's better to be safe than sorry. Bring in your potted plants and enjoy their blooms and foliage for an extended period of time.

I placed my banana tree in my living room, and it's my new favorite place to hang out. I feel like I'm in a cozy indoor oasis. Don't leave your plants out to die! Don't let them wither away! What a waste of money! Take care of your precious plants by sheltering them from the cold, and you'll be rewarded with a continued display of beauty. If you manage to adequately care for your plants during the winter, you'll be able to set them out again once the weather warms. You'll escape the need to spend money next spring.

Many potted plants don't need as much attention in the winter anyhow, so bringing them in won't leave you with extra work on your hands. Watering needs typically diminish during the cold months. Tropical plants, however, may require higher levels of humidity than are possible in your winter home. Place a humidifier nearby or spritz your plants with a spray bottle every so often. The spring is the best time to re-home your plant into a slightly larger vessel.

Don't have any tropical plants or potted flowers to bring inside? If you have a potted vegetable plant, it may be a good idea to bring that in, as well. Shelter potted peppers indoors and you'll have an extended harvest. Give them plenty of warmth and sunlight, and you'll be able to pick peppers throughout the off-season.

Do you bring your potted plants indoors? Have you been able to

keep a plant alive for more than a season this way? Share your story in the comments!

Fall is Slowly Approaching: What to Do in the Garden



As soon as the calendar flipped to September and 'back to school' was declared, Mother Nature seemed to follow suit. Nighttime temperatures chilled rapidly, and in the mornings, I need to throw on a sweater to head outside. I've wholeheartedly embraced the fall season. My pumpkin decorations are out, my candles are flickering on the credenza, and I'm dreaming about all the fun fall activities I want to partake in the coming months. Everything suddenly feels cozier. I'm eager to curl up and read through my TBR

(to-be-read) pile of books. I'm irrationally upset over the fact that my wardrobe doesn't contain more orange hues. My weekly meal plan consists of stews, soups, and root vegetables. Fall is early, and I hope it's here to stay.

As a gardener, the arrival of fall typically means it's time to begin the yearly ritual cleanup. I try to get through it bit by bit, attacking some tasks earlier than others, so as not to overwhelm myself in late October or November. If you're noticing the chill sneaking up on you, but you're unsure where to start with your cleanup, here are a few suggestions:

Get rid of nightshades: Heat-loving plants are the first to be extracted from my garden. The cold nights begin to stress the eggplants and peppers. A few tomatoes might still appear, but if your plants are no longer producing, browning, and looking less than perky it's time to pull them and toss them in the brown bin. Never throw diseased plants in your compost, but feel free to toss healthy ones in there.

Save some bean seeds: I've left my first bean plants to die out because I'm planning to save some seeds from a few forgotten pods. Saving bean seeds is incredibly easy, and if you do it, you won't have to spend money on packets for next season. Leave the pods and harvest the seeds once the pods have dried out completely.

Get rid of anything disease or pest-infested: Toss skeletonize kale and brassicas into your city compost bin.

Cover beds: If you're growing anything for a late harvest, you may want to consider adding protection if you're in a particularly cold climate. A bit of cover is also useful to prevent leaves from falling all over your beds. It'll also keep pesky squirrels from snatching a last-minute snack.

Remove non-permanent structures: Decorations, non-permanent trellises, and unused pots and containers can be put away in

the shed or garage for the season. Any summer tools (e.g., shade cloth) can be stored away safely, too.

Don't forget your fall crops. If you're growing things like arugula, lettuce, and spinach for a fall or winter harvest, don't forget about them. Even in the chillier weather, your plants need to be watered and cared for.

Do these things bit by bit and you'll discover that the end of the gardening season will become a lot less stressful. It's the exact same way I treat my house cleaning chores. I do a little bit of something every day. That way, I'm not left pulling my hair to get it all in in a single day.