

Preparing the Garden for the Off-Season

Mother Nature shows us when it's time to put the garden to bed for the winter. The leaves are falling, the lawn has turned green, and the annuals are looking tired.

Look at your turf. It will survive winter and come back more vigorously in spring if you do a few things. The fall and winter months are ideal times to make lime applications. The first steps towards correcting an existing problem is to test your soil. Get a soil test at the front desk at Green Spring Gardens or at www.ext.vt.edu. It's a good idea to test your soil every three years. To get additional information on lawn care, check out the Virginia Tech "Fall Lawn Care" publication. <http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-520/430-520-pdf.pdf> . It is also a good idea to aerate the lawn and to continue watering until it turns brown.

If you have a vegetable garden, pull up old vines and vegetable plants. Insect pests that feed on these plants often lay their eggs on the old plants. If they are not diseased, work the old plants back into the garden soil. In addition to garden debris, you can add other organic material into the soil. Well-rotted manure, compost, peat or leaves will work.

Pull all annual flowers if diseased, and put them in the trash. If they are disease free, compost them or dig them into the garden. Pull weeds wherever they are in the garden. Weeds that are spread by seeds can produce thousands of seeds, so get rid of them now.

The days are shorter, and dropping temperatures cause deciduous trees and shrubs to drop leaves and prepare for winter dormancy. Limit fertilization in fall since nitrogen stimulates late-season growth and delays dormancy. Continue to water trees and shrubs to send them into winter with ample moisture.

For more information, visit the [Green Spring Gardens Library](http://www.ext.vt.edu) or see the publication list at Virginia Tech, <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/>