



Fall Cleanup: A Necessary Project.

Dave's Tips

- Leaving old plants in the field can provide a place for insects and disease to overwinter and cause problems again next season. This is especially true with perennials that are permanent plantings and do not get rotated every year. (Be sure you are planting your annuals in new areas each year. - Crop Rotation)
- Mow and rake your beds to get rid of dead flowers and weeds or cut back and haul away dead plants.
- Support netting can make cleaning out beds difficult. There are several options: Cut out the netting and trash it. Burn the bed and the netting will disintegrate. Pull it up and add it to the compost pile. Once the plant debris has composted completely, the netting can be separated.
- Peonies should be cut back after the first frost. The plant debris should be composted or trashed if it has any black spots, mildew, or other disease problems on the plants.
- Find a location off the farm to dispose of crops that had a bad case of insects or disease. You increase the chance of having the same problems next year if you keep them around.
- Dig and store any tender bulb crops that you want to save. What is "tender" in your area depends on your weather and hardiness zone. Before digging ask yourself if digging and storing is cost effective or if purchasing new bulbs/plants is the better way to go.
- Remember, compost is supposed to produce heat that kills all the insects, seeds, and disease pathogens. Compost of weeds and dead plants collected in the fall will not be ready to use until after warm weather next summer. (Fresh leaves can be used as a mulch the way Lisa does on her fields.)
- Disconnect and drain all irrigation lines, especially any filters or injectors. Injectors, timers, and filters should be stored in a heated building. You can't always get all the water out of them.
- It is best to roll up and store drip tape; otherwise, it will blow away during the winter.
- Make sure your faucets are turned off inside and opened and drained from the outside. Frost proof hydrants are only frost proof if turned off and the hose is removed.
- If you have an area with landscape fabric, that was installed this season, it will blow away over the winter. The staples are not rusted enough, and the soil is too loose to hold tight during winter winds. Add sand bags, rocks, cinder blocks, lumber, etc. around the edges and on the seams.

- If you have a tunnel you do not plan to use over the winter, remove the plastic. You'll sleep better during snow storms.
- If you are keeping plastic on a tunnel or you have heated greenhouses, check the condition of the poly covering. It's no fun recovering a house in January after a snowstorm has ripped through the plastic and your plants have frozen. Do it now.
- Shade structures must be taken down before any chance of snow. Just a couple inches of snow may cause collapse.
- Prep beds in the fall for early spring planting. Even if you need to touch them up in the spring, it is easier to make the beds in the fall.
- Tractors, tiller, mowers, and other power equipment should be winterized before being put away until spring. Check your owner's manual, or search Youtube videos for "winterize mower."
- Keep up the weed patrol. If you see annual weeds sprouting in the fall, that's a good thing. They will die with the first frost. But perennial weeds.... they are like Cool Flowers, they will sprout, grow over the winter, and be nice, big, happy weeds in the spring. Try to kill them off in the fall.
- Even after a hard freeze and you have put the fields to bed for the winter, you should walk the grounds occasionally to make sure everything is going okay.

Lisa's 2 cents

- Consider planting cool-season cover crops in areas not planted with winter flowers, veggie crops, or that will be planted in early spring. Crimson clover is hardy to -10 °F and is easy to incorporate in spring. It adds nitrogen to the soil, in addition to suppressing weeds, adds organic matter, and provide blooms for bees. A good choice for warm-season annuals. Incorporate into the soil at the height of blooming.
- Collect bags of leaves to use as mulch in pathways and for making leaf mold. Once you start using them you will never have enough. We do not chop up the leaves, we dump bags directly in pathways as mulch or into cages to make leaf mold.
- Be consistent with hoeing the direct-seeded, hardy, annual beds. Do it every 10-14 days until winter temperatures start and stay.