

AUTUMN GARDEN CLEANUP

Many minor autumn gardening chores such as ripping out the old tomato or squash vines have major impact on future gardening endeavors. For instance, removing old foliage and plants from flower and vegetable beds minimizes many diseases. Blight diseases and powdery mildew are just two examples of diseases minimized by good cleanup. Insects such as corn borer and iris borer may also be removed along with old foliage.

Do not place diseased or insect infected foliage in the compost. Even the hottest pile will not kill disease spores or insects. Dispose of this material in your municipality's compost program.

Tilling garden soil just before it freezes solid is beneficial. Squash vine borers and root maggots burrow deep into the soil to over winter. Late tilling exposes them to colder temperatures than they can tolerate, often killing them. If grass clippings and ground-up leaves are tilled in at the same time they will decompose over the winter, improving soil texture.

Lawns should be mowed right until the freeze sets in. Grass grows fast in cool weather. Lawn should be the same length going into the winter as it was all summer. If it is longer, it is more likely to develop snow mold and dieback.

In November, you can fertilize the lawn with a slow-release mix for the last time of the season. Slow-release fertilizers are formulated so that high percentages of the nutrients are still available in the early spring when grass growth resumes. By using a slow-release fertilizer in the fall, one can skip the first feeding next spring, which tends to minimize certain diseases. In general, unless a soil test has indicated otherwise, a slow-release fertilizer should

consist mostly of nitrogen with small percentages of phosphorus and potassium.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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