KPOV — *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Getting Ready for Fall”

September 3, 2019

It may seem early to be thinking about getting ready for fall, but the first day of fall is only three weeks from today! Many plants in the garden are sensitive to the colder night time temperatures that fall brings, so now is the time to protect them if you can. There are season extenders that many gardeners in Central Oregon employ to add a few degrees of protection to tomatoes, peppers, melons and cucumber. Cover cloth and clear plastic can be attached to hoops of pvc piping. This is especially easy to do in raised beds. Or you can add a layer of dark mulch such as leaves, pine needles, dried grass clippings, newspaper or cardboard. Mulching helps conserve moisture, maintain soil at an even temperature, and reduce soil compaction from rain or snow. As an added bonus it will reduce weed germination and growth and add nutrients to the soil for next year.

If you have pumpkins, peppers or tomatoes that are not quite ripe, you can harvest them now. They won’t survive a hard frost, but they will ripen off the vine. First, inspect, wash and dry them. To help pumpkins last longer, gently wipe them with a 10% solution of bleach diluted with water. For tomatoes, place them in a flat, wide box with an absorbent layer beneath them and enough space in between so that they’re not touching one another. Store in a cool, darkened area. Check every few days and remove any rotten tomatoes. When you notice at least half of the tomato is red, let it finish ripening on your kitchen counter. Don’t forget to harvest your mature root crops before winter sets in. If left in the ground, they might encourage pests to become established in your garden.

Next, you’ll want to clean up your garden beds. Fall clean-up prevents overwintering of pests and diseases and cuts down on spring weeding. We’ve already mentioned the need to harvest all of your mature vegetables before the first hard frost. You’ll also want to bag up and place all diseased foliage and weeds in the garbage. Any healthy remaining plant matter can be composted.

Rake up leaves and cut back the perennials to 6 to 8” above ground. This will make it easier for you to apply mulch and allows the remaining stems to hold snow in place. Both will help insulate your plants. The healthy foliage that you’ve cut back and leaves you’ve raked can be composted.

The next step in preparing your garden for winter is to amend your soil. This is essential for Central Oregon gardens. Our soil usually has few nutrients, is very sandy and won’t hold moisture well. A well-composted organic layer of about 3” will decompose over the winter and add nutrients to the soil. For perennials, mulch should come up to the shoulder, but not cover the growing crown of the plant.

Prune roses in the fall to about waist height. This is also the time to prune your evergreens and conifers. If interior needles are turning yellow or brown and dropping, don’t worry. This is normal fall needle loss for conifers.

One additional and essential step is to be sure your plants have adequate water. Water your perennials, trees and shrubs by deep soaking them before the ground freezes. Water every 6 to 8 weeks throughout the winter as long as the soil isn’t frozen solid and will accept water. It may come as a surprise, but one of the main reasons Central Oregon plants die over the winter is lack of sufficient water.

If you’d like to learn more about getting your garden ready for next year, there will be a free class taught by a Master Gardener at Hollinshead Community Garden on Saturday, September 14th from 10 to 11 am.

For more information on this or other gardening topics, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or check our website [GOCOMGA.COM](http://GOCOMGA.COM)

This has been Gardening: Get Good At It on KPOV — The Point.

Resources:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/sites/default/files/Winter_Care_of_Perennials-reference_list.pdf>

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/checklist-putting-your-garden-bed-winter>

<http://pnwhandbooks.org/plantdisease/pathogen-articles/nonpathogenic-phenomena/winter-injury-landscape-plants-pacific-northwest>

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/gardening-calendar/october>