

Winterizing Your Garden
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The chill's in the air and evenings darken sooner, signaling the transition into winter. What does winter have in store for us this year? A continuing La Nina system by all reports, which could mean more rain, cooler temperatures, and bigger snowstorms are likely in coming months.

We can't control Mother Nature, but we can take steps to prepare our gardens for winter. So, resist the impulse to take a warm throw, a good book and a cup of tea to your favorite chair; instead step outside and do your garden a big favor!

- Get those plants you've meant to put in the ground into soil now. The soil will help insulate the plant so the roots don't freeze.
- Finish planting those spring-blooming bulbs (tulips, daffodils, crocus) this month. Hardy bulbs settled into soil usually resist sudden freezes.
- Dig up tender bulbs (e.g. tuberous begonias, gladiolas) to store indoors. Trim off remaining stems, shake off soil, dry to avoid diseases, and store in sawdust or similar material in a cool, dry place. If soil is well-drained and tubers are mulched, dahlias can often remain in the ground through winter.
- Clean up your perennial garden beds. Weed flower beds and pull out spent annuals. Rake and compost dropped blooms and leaves, keeping any diseased parts out of your compost. Many gardeners cut back perennials now, some enjoy watching the changing texture and others let birds feed on the seed pods.
- With a cooler winter predicted, applying mulch will help protect plants from winter's extremes and decrease winter weeds. Apply a 3- to 4-inch mulch of shredded leaves, compost, pine needles or straw on all bare ground.
- Move containers that are out in the open to more protected areas. Remove annuals and leave hardy perennials for winter interest. Plan to protect these containers during cold spells.
- Bring in all houseplants – now. Clean pots and check for insects before moving.
- Finally, drain and bring garden hoses inside and turn off their water sources. Winterize faucets and store tools.

These are not thankless tasks – you'll reap the rewards with a healthier garden when spring arrives!

Add tag line if space permits – *Master Gardener training starts in January. Call Kathy at 360-301-44938 for details.*