

Garden Column 10/26/2011
Winterizing Your Garden
Roger McPherson

I am writing this from the perspective of the weather that we face in Port Townsend with cold down to about 20 degrees, strong winds and quite a bit of rain. We could get a hard frost just about anytime so you should be digging up and potting tender perennials such as heliotrope, tender fuchsias and geraniums that you may want to keep in a sheltered spot or inside.

This has been a great year for tuberous begonias, but those tubers won't make it through the winter. Pull up the begonias and lay them on a newspaper in your garage or basement. After the top has died and the soil on the tuber dried, clean the tuber, label it and store it in a paper bag with some dry peat moss, vermiculite or shavings. I like to dust it with a fungicide so it doesn't get a fungus.

Tender plants that are hard to move can be covered with dry leaves or straw and wrapped in something like burlap. My dahlias seem to survive the winter with a good layer of mulch. I trim them down to 2" stubs and mound a 6" pile of bark over them.

You don't want strong winds breaking tree limbs or plant stems. It is a good time to trim unsightly excess growth and vigorous ornamentals. I also like to do an initial pruning of some of my leggy roses to prevent damage. They will get a final pruning in February just before they start next year's growth (as will the apples and pears).

The best preparation for our wet winters is cleanup of the beds and yards. You don't want a layer of soggy leaves smothering your plants and providing a hiding place for pests and fungi. Get rid of the diseased leaves that may have dropped from your roses, fruit trees or those mushy lily leaves, etc. A layer of clean mulch or compost can then be spread to protect and enrich the soil and the roots near the surface.

Oh, and weeds! Pull them while the soil is damp, but not soggy. They will only get bigger, better rooted and harder to pull. Have fun.