

**Preparing the Garden, Trees, Shrubs and Lawn for Fall and Winter**  
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Hopefully, all you members of the Estes Park gardening community are having a bountiful summer. As you harvest your remaining vegetables and fruit, let's redirect some attention on garden and yard preparation for the coming fall and winter.

If done with attentiveness, gardening, even in Estes Park, can be a year round activity, although at a slower pace with various chores out of doors in the fall and winter. So let's map out the next few months for the garden, yard, trees, and shrubs.

**SEPTEMBER:**

Keeping in mind that this is Estes and plummeting night temps can pretty much "do in" whatever tender plants are in your garden, try direct-seeding fall season crops such as Swiss chard, lettuce, arugula, spinach and kale. For dry or compacted soil, first water the area; after a few days, fluff up the soil by hand tilling to help water penetration and root growth. Again, this being Estes, use cold frames over outdoor plants for as long as possible before hard winter sets in.

Yes, if you have the resources, you can provide electric heat under the cold frames. I have done this with varying degrees of success to extend the growing/establishment season, trying both oil lamps and electrical heating. I found oil lamps to be much too messy with sooty air pollution. Water every two or three days through germination.

I have to say I have not ever planted fall vegetable crops in Estes. I am well done with vegetable tending by the first frost except for having remaining crops under cold frames until they are finished. If you have had a particularly successful vegetable, you might consider drying the seeds and storing them for next year's crops.

You might consider planting a cover crop in your raised beds instead of continuing to nurture remaining vegetables. I have had success with this in September when there are some sunny days and the soil has not yet cooled down. I have successfully had winter rye germinate before winter set in and turned it under in the spring to amend the soil. For a comprehensive listing of other types of cover crops (green manure) see [cmg.colostate.edu/Gardennotes/244.pdf](http://cmg.colostate.edu/Gardennotes/244.pdf), "Cover Crops and Green Manure Crops."

For fall crop container vegetables growing in the house or green house, use fresh potting soil amended with a slow release fertilizer.

For lawns, prepare them for winter by:

- Performing an irrigation system (if you have one) integrity check, making sure all hoses and or drip lines are intact, as well as sprinkler heads in the vertical position. With an eye on the weather, gage, as best you can, when to shut hoses and lines off at the valve and purge the system of water prior to freezing.
- Fertilize lawns with a nitrogen based fertilizer. Colorado lawns do not need additional phosphorus. Mown grass clipping can be mulched right into the lawn since they are rich in nitrogen. The older the lawn needs less commercial fertilizer, with mulched grass clippings

being sufficient as a nitrogen amendment.

- Repair bare patches in the lawn with appropriate seed or turf and keep moist but well drained until seed have germinated/turf established.
- Consider aeration as this will set up the lawn to receive additional seeding in the plug holes and stimulate grass root growth next spring.
- Mow tall in the fall since longer green grass blades will maximally photosynthesize and provide extra root nutrient storage going into the winter. Stop mowing when the lawn stops growing.

#### OCTOBER:

- Prevent winter sunscald damage to young, leafless, thin barked trees with application of tree wrap to the trunks. Note: Remove the wrap in April. Have you ever noticed how in January some years up here that there might be a foot of snow on the ground with no wind and yet you can get sunburned in about five minutes? The same goes for young trees (meaning up to three years old at which point, generally, they should be well established). Learn more about sunscald on the Colorado State Extension website.
- Set up a schedule to water young trees and shrubs every three to six weeks unless we have an unusually wet season throughout the winter. Bring out water hoses if/when the temps are over 40 degrees. Southern and western exposures usually need the deepest watering, along with any newly planted perennials, trees, and shrubs. Water each setting for about 30 minutes.
- Disconnect hoses and roll them up to prevent freeze damage to the hoses. Note: Warm and windy fall weather dries the out the landscape even faster.

#### NOVEMBER:

- Winter should be here, but water young trees anyway. Thanksgiving is good to mark on the calendar for watering.
- Schedule tree pruning for the late winter dormant season, i.e. February.

#### DECEMBER:

- Water young trees Christmas Day or thereabouts.
- If you have outdoor Christmas trees decorated, you might consider using regular small tree lights (not LED). These can raise the temperature by 3-4 degrees, which can prevent freezing to help get through some colder weather. The difference between a freeze and a killing frost is 4 degrees (32 vs 28 degrees).

JANUARY: Water young trees New Year's Day or thereabouts.

FEBRUARY: Water young trees Valentine's Day.

Use your best judgment for winter watering. Do not bother if snow is on the ground and there are daytime melting temps. Do not water trees if temperatures are subfreezing.

Winter watering of trees might seem like a waste of water. But be assured it is not. Using some due diligence in doing so will be well rewarded in the spring by your appreciative trees happily leafing out.

By all means, enjoy the winter break and holiday season, and plan for next year's gardening.

For additional details and lots of other gardening information, see the Colorado State University Extension website, [extension.colostate.edu](http://extension.colostate.edu). The author thanks Dr. Tony Koski, CSU Extension Turf

Specialist and Master Gardener, and Dr. Alison O'Connor, CSU Extension in Larimer County for their contributions to this article.

*Skip von Kaenel, a retired U.S. Army officer and International Red Cross humanitarian relief delegate, has over sixty years of gardening experience in several parts of the world. He received his Colorado State University Master Gardener's qualification in 2012. Having grown up in the South, he considers himself an enthusiastic aficionado of fine, vine-ripened tomatoes as well as all other fresh vegetables and has personally experienced the significant challenges of gardening here in Estes' cool, high elevation environment since 2008. He looks forward very much to sharing his gardening knowledge and experience with other gardeners.*

*Estes Valley Community Garden Board thanks Skip for sharing his knowledge by providing this article for publication.*