

Preparing Your Garden for Winter

By Nannette Chisholm

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As the aspen change from a golden shimmer on the trees to a blanket of crispy leaves carpeting the forest floor, we are being reminded that the change of seasons in Estes Park is upon us. For those of us who have enjoyed preparing, planting, cultivating and harvesting delicious foods from our gardens, now we must turn to the last bits of work needed to prepare our gardens for the upcoming months of winter.

Here is a list of ideas that may help you tuck your garden in for a long winter's nap and prepare it for a healthy, vital start next spring.

1. Remove any plants from your garden that have had insect or fungus problems. This removes any potential eggs that may have been laid on plant stalks or leaves from troublesome insects, thereby reducing these same problems next year.
2. Identify healthy plants, then chop them up and till them back into the soil to provide organic matter for your soil next year.
3. Prune your perennials. Herbs such as rosemary, thyme and sage all benefit from fall pruning, as do asparagus and rhubarb.
4. Mulch your precious strawberries! When the days have gotten much colder, and the temperatures are in the mid 20's for several days in a row, it is time to place about 6 inches of clean straw over your berry plants. This will help protect them through the harsh winter months. In spring when the days are beginning to warm up, remove the straw. Do not use hay, which is full of seeds that will bring unwanted weeds into your strawberry beds.
5. Review what worked and what didn't. Make a new garden plan for the spring. This is a perfect time to reflect on what grew well for you, and what did not. Which plants attracted insects and fungus? I like to make a square foot gardening chart on paper and play around with companion planting strategies, long before I plant. So take a minute to ponder how you might arrange your garden differently next year, and what new plants you might like to grow. It's great to plan for next year now, while this year's challenges and successes are fresh in your mind.
6. Clean and sharpen your tools, reorganize your garden supplies, pack up your hoops and hail cloth if you have used them on a raised bed, and in general, just bring closure to your garden and give yourself a head start for next year. In this way, you feel ready and prepared when spring FINALLY rolls around again next year in Estes Park, and you are dying to get that garden going again!
7. Most importantly, take a minute with your garden to sit quietly and give thanks. I like to spend time with my plot at the end of the year to really appreciate and remember all the fun, excitement and great food I was provided with by gardening. Thank the earth for her continual support and abundance, the sun and rain for nourishing your tiny plot of land, and the critters who did NOT totally eat your entire garden! All this gratitude feeds the garden as well as your soul, bringing a sense of joy and abundance to your ongoing relationship with the land.

Nannette Chisholm has been a Reiki Master and Shamanic Energy Medicine Practitioner for the past 18 years in Estes Park. She earned her Master of Science Degree in Sustainable Systems Design in 1991, and approaches all her life's interests with a deep reverence for humanity, nature and bringing balance to the whole. This is her third year gardening with EVCG.