

## Fall Yard Projects

By: Melinda Sperl

Fall is the time of year to prepare your yard for winter. Because we are somewhat in a tropical climate many of our plants cannot survive our normal winters. Proper preparation can save many of your plants this year.

Mulch is the most important item for winter preparedness. Mulch gives insulation to the roots of plants, keeps weed seeds from germinating, retains moisture around the roots, oxygenates the soil, then biodegrades to feed the plants. Putting a generous layer of mulch is important yet it is important to note not to drown your plants in mulch as too much can restrict the airflow to the roots.

Winterize your grass. Use a low nitrogen, slow release, fertilizer to feed your plants and grass for the winter months. Even though it is winter, your plants are still growing roots. Give them food to grow to store energy through winter and come back healthy in the spring. If you use a high nitrogen fertilizer on your grass brown patch will result.

Your plants on the other hand are growing and blooming and need nitrogen and a good slow release fertilizer can benefit your plants especially those that are setting blooms for the spring like your azaleas.

Apply pre-emergent herbicide to your flowerbeds and grass to kill the weed seeds that will germinate the following season. Remember that you will not see the Pre-emergent work as it kills weed seeds that fall to the ground that would grow a year later. These are very effective products and should be used every spring and fall.

Tree trimming should only be done in the winter when the tree is dormant and the sap is not flowing because of the insects that feed on the sap. These insects can infest a tree and totally kill it within one growing season. Remember that trees only need to be trimmed every 5 to 10 years and really should only be done by a certified arborist. Avoid the guy that knocks on your door that says he was working at your neighbors and has a crew free! One bad trim can damage a beautiful tree for life.

Now is NOT the time to trim spring blooming plants like azaleas or Loropetalums as they are busy setting blooms for spring. If you can avoid trimming those now you will be awarded in the spring with a bountiful bloom season.

Plant those veggie gardens now as this is a great time for vegetables.

Trim knockout and climbing roses now. Remove dead wood and any crossed branches. Weave or tie up any trailing stems to keep them growing where desired.

Happy Gardening!

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