

Fall Landscape Maintenance

Perennial, Shrub and Tree Fall Care



Fall is a great time to do some important plant maintenance; however, timing can be critical when determining what maintenance should happen in the fall.

Perennial Care

Perennials are plants that grow from the crown every spring; therefore, there is no need to leave any leaf, stem, or flower structure through the winter. Perennials will start to go into dormancy at different time throughout the season. Some, like the bleeding heart, will go into dormancy starting in mid-summer. As your plants start to go into dormancy (for most perennials, this is after several hard freezes), the plant can be cut back, leaving just a few inches of plant material above ground. Giving your perennials an extra blanket around the crown and root zone of mulch would be beneficial if an open winter is predicted; however, do not apply the mulch until just before the ground freezes up, and remove it as soon as plants start to break dormancy.

Tree Care

While you can prune trees in the fall, a more ideal time would be winter, finishing up no later than in February. Best practices for pruning would involve thinning cuts, rather than pruning all branches to control size. Preparing for rodent/animal damage may be the most important step you take in fall care for trees; however, newly planted trees need bark protection, which would include wrapping with tree wrap or plastic tree protectors. For better protection, consider fencing your trees the first couple of years after planting to prevent deer from rubbing on limbs.



Shrub Care

Proper shrub care primarily involves correct pruning practices. Fall is typically the best time to prune shrubs, and waiting until plants go into dormancy is preferred but not necessary. Many shrubs can be pruned in the fall; however, any shrubs that bloom in the spring and set their flower buds in late summer will need to be avoided and should be pruned in early summer. Some of these include lilac and rhododendron. Shrubs should be pruned no more than 1/3 off to maintain size. If you are planning on achieving rejuvenation of your plants, then prune the shrubs to within 6-10 inches of the ground. Do not cut this far back until the plant has gone into dormancy. Winter is best for this type of pruning.