

Putting Your Garden to Bed for the Winter

By Lacy A., member of The Naperville Garden Club

As days shorten and frost appears, it's time to prepare for 5-6 months of cold temperatures (sorry, but that's Chicago). First, take note of plant combinations for both your annuals and perennials. What were you pleased with that you want to repeat next year, and what do you not want to try again? Maybe the colors were off or the textures were too similar to be planted next to each other. Possibly some plants were located in too much or not enough sun. Maybe you have been inspired by something you've seen in a magazine or in someone's garden and would like to give it a try in your own garden. You might want to consider tying a piece of yarn around perennials that need moving next spring.

After a hot, dry summer like 2005, **Xeriscape**, which is the use of naturally drought tolerant plants, may be an option. These plants normally have much deeper root systems and can withstand most droughts. Examples of these plants are native prairie grasses and native prairie flowers such as Purple Cone Flower, New England Aster, Golden Rod, Black Eyed Susan, Monarda and Tall coreopsis.

When putting your garden to bed for the winter, the biggest task is to distinguish plants that get mushy over winter, harboring insects and diseases, from those that stay semi-evergreen and/or provide winter food and protection for the birds by peeking through the drifts of snow.

The following plants should be cut down to 2-4 inches: *hosta*, *day lily*, *Monarda*, *peonies*, *bearded iris*, *perennial geraniums*, *sundrops*, and *spiderwort*. Discard the leaves and stems after cutting back. Plants to leave alone include: *Echineacea* (purple cone flower), *Heliopsis*, *black-eyed susan*, *lavender*, *Liatris* and *Buddleia* (butterfly bush). Also, leave most perennial grasses that "have intricate seed heads and outstanding habits, hold snow, frost and ice in a way special from other plants" writes Tracy DiSabato in the August 2005 issue of *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden*. DiSabato also mentions **marginally hardy plants** that are insulated by having their leaves and stalks on over winter. Examples include: *mums*, *asters* and *tender ferns*.

Dig up tender bulbs such as *dahlia*, *cannas* and *gladiola* and store them in a cool, dry location where they are sure not to freeze. In general, clean up piles of fallen leaves that tend to mat and harbor disease. Be especially careful to discard any leaves that are diseased and could spread to other plants. Lastly, protect plants from alternate freezing and thawing by mulching around their base.

Members of Naperville Garden Club write this monthly gardening article for area homeowner association newsletters. Our hope is that your interest in gardening will be piqued and that we can pass along some new and valuable information. This is a civic project for our club and we sincerely hope you will enjoy the articles. The Naperville Garden Club meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month. If you are interested in visiting one of our meetings or have any questions, please visit our web site at www.napervillegardenclub.org.