



13 ways to get your garden ready for winter

Most of us give our lawns a final mow during October or November and then leave our gardens to fend for themselves over the bitter winter months. But Lincolnshire garden designer Julian Gardner of Gardner Designs says spending a little longer preparing your outside space for the colder weather will help it to look its best come spring, while clever planting will ensure you have a green garden to enjoy throughout the year. Don't miss our month by month garden calendar for more tips.

1. Tidy paths and paving

Clear up all the leaves and debris once the trees are bare (it's much easier while everything is still crisp and dry). It's also worth giving your paving a thorough clean with a stiff brush and some soapy water before the frost arrives so it will be less slippery and safer during the wet winter months. Alternatively, if you have one, just give it a blast with a pressure washer.

2. Maintain borders

Cut back the herbaceous perennials in your borders close to the ground as they begin to die down and remove annuals that have finished their show. It's also well worth generally tidying up your borders by removing any dead foliage, leaves and weeds.

Clip lawn edges and clear spent stems from perennials, but save anything with attractive seed heads – these look magical when frosted. Similarly, don't cut back deciduous grasses; leave these until late February, as the dead foliage also helps protect the plant's crown.

Now is the time to empty out your compost bins of old, well-rotted material and spread all over the fresh soil to set it up for the spring and make it look presentable during the bare winter months. Your compost bins can then be filled up again with this year's waste ready to become next year's bounty. Just be sure to dispose of your weeds separately.

Design-wise, narrow strips allow little space for plants, and thin borders tight to boundaries are somewhat unimaginative. Be generous; using an edging iron, make borders bigger.

3. Pay attention to shrubs and trees

Prune any wayward branches on your structural shrubs to improve the overall shape and, if they need it, give your hedges a final trim before the frosts hit. Remove any dead, diseased or damaged branches, particularly with your trees, to prevent the stems from rubbing together and creating wounds or deformities.

To add some winter interest to your garden, look for trees and shrubs with brilliantly coloured bark. They are at their best now, and ideal in smaller gardens, where two or more seasons of interest are desirable. The Burgundy Tibetan cherry (*Prunus serrulata*), chalk-white paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), striped snakebark maples, and the cinnamon paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*) are favourites. Shrubby dogwoods are striking, too, and come in flame-orange, scarlet and yellow.

4. Repair garden structures

Once your borders and structural shrubs and trees have been cut back, it's a good opportunity to gain easy access to carry out any maintenance work that may be required on your summerhouse, greenhouse or fencing. Keep a particular eye out for any decaying timber or pest infestations and treat or replace accordingly.

5. Protect plants

Move any pots planted with tender species like Cannas, Agapanthus or palms, into a conservatory or greenhouse for winter protection. Wrap horticultural fleece around the trunks of any palm trees planted in the ground and spread a thick mulch of bark around the base of these and any other delicate trees, like Japanese maples, to protect them from the frost.

Small deciduous trees, shrubs and roses can be lifted bare-root and replanted before mid-March. Everything else, especially evergreens and conifers, needs rootballing. For detailed advice and step-by-step instructions on this, search for 'moving plants' on the RHS website.

6. Tidy ponds and water features

Try to prevent your pond or water feature clogging up with leaves by temporarily covering in a net during 'the fall'. If your pond hasn't been cleaned in a number of years and is beginning to look murky, then late autumn is the ideal time to tackle it while many creatures are becoming dormant. If there are fish in your pond, then try to be vigilant during frosts to ensure that the water's surface doesn't completely freeze over, even if you just have a ball on standby to float on the water's surface it will help.

7. Prepare the lawn

Go over your entire lawn with a scarifying or springtine rake to remove thatch and moss to allow it to breathe and grow more freely. If you do have a large amount of moss invading your green space, then there's a good chance that you have drainage issues – a session with a lawn spike aerator or even just a standard garden fork across the area will help considerably. Combine with specially produced autumn lawn feed and moss killer products to give your lawn all the help you can.

8. Plant out spring-flowering bulbs

Plant out your spring bulbs before the winter kicks in. From snowdrops to crocus and daffodils, they all like well-fertilised, free-draining soil, so dig in lots of sharp sand and some bone meal for a slow release of nutrients that will feed the bulbs over a long period. When planting bulbs, the general rule of thumb is to plant at two or three times the depth of the bulb itself. Spacing also works well at two or three times the width of the bulb, and for the most natural and dramatic effect, plant the same variety of bulb in large drifts.

9. Watch out for snow

It cannot be overstated how devastating heavy and prolonged periods of snow and ice can be to the trees and plants in your garden. If you simply knock off the snow resting on the leaves and branches of your prized specimens while it's still soft and fresh there is a good chance that you

will be preventing severe damage and possible fatalities – so it's worth staying on alert when the white stuff arrives.

10. Indulge in winter greenery and colour

Just because the winter is a time of dormancy for many living things, doesn't mean that your garden can't still be interesting and exciting. Incorporate architectural evergreen shrubs like the Phormium tenax to add crucial structure alongside deciduous shrubs like the Cornus sanguinea 'Midwinter Fire' to set the winter border alight with its gorgeous flame-coloured stems. Find out [how to plan a winter garden](#).

Fill containers with winter pansies, polyanthus and violas, one species per pot. For more creative displays, partner them with evergreen grasses, perennials, small shrubs and bulbs.

11. Act on any privacy issues that become apparent

If gaps in boundaries begin to show in winter, then trees, particularly evergreens, tall-but-thin shrubs and bamboo, hedges and pleached trees (hedges on 'stilts') are useful, but they're not immediate solutions – unless you buy large plants. For instant impact, choose woven hazel or willow screens, tight-knit trelliswork or wooden louvres, all of which will let in light. Be mindful of height restrictions: in back gardens it's two metres, and at the front of the house one metre (unless local covenants apply). Anything higher will need planning permission. With these limits in mind it's a good idea to create private areas or 'rooms' within your garden, where you are free to plant taller trees and shrubs as you choose.

Find out more about [improving privacy in your garden](#)

12. Install outdoor lighting to add another dimension

Outdoor lighting is a must for cheering up your garden in winter. Sunlight doesn't discriminate, but in the night garden you can focus attention on sculptural elements, trees and topiary. Spotlights are the most versatile fittings and can be positioned at different angles for varying effects. Use a powerful torch to experiment.

13. Make a to-do list

The garden is relatively quiet in winter, in terms of day-to-day tasks, so it is the ideal time to tackle any garden jobs that you may have put off doing. Experienced gardeners also know that, even though the growing season has finished, there's always work to do and spring isn't that far off. Anything done now will lessen the load later on.

For new garden design ideas, put your ideas down on paper, ideally to scale, before you invest in anything new. Whether you are creating a new bed entirely or just giving a facelift to existing borders, it's always best to design the area first before undertaking the work.

By Laura Crombie July 25, 2018

<https://www.realhomes.com/content/10-ways-to-get-your-garden-ready-for-winter>