



GARDEN NOTES

PREPARE YOUR YARD FOR SLEEP

By Dennis Hinkamp

October 1998

Fall-22

Think of the approaching winter as a sign to prepare your yard for bed. Make sure it is covered, warm and has a drink of water. A kiss and an impassioned reading of *The Secret Garden* are optional.

Extra precautions taken in early fall can give plants a better chance of surviving what could be an eventful winter if all the “El Nino” predictions come true, say Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.

“Though the days are getting shorter and cooler, your plants and even your lawn need water to tide them over till next spring,” Goodspeed says.

“A late, deep fall watering gives woody plants with shallow root systems a better chance of survival. Trees that fall into this category include birch, some maples, lindens and spruce.” He says evergreen shrubs also need an extra drink going into the winter. Although growth slows in the winter, they still use water and can suffer some desiccation from dry southern winds. Plants along the foundation of a house seem to be a little more susceptible. Shrubs to watch included junipers, evergreen *Euonymus* and laurels, Oregon grape, dwarf Alberta spruce and yews.

“Dry lawns are also more prone to winter damage,” he adds. “Newly established lawns are especially likely to have problems. Give them a good deep drink before you shut off the water and roll up the garden hoses.”

Pay special attention to plants such as strawberries, roses and shallow-rooted shrubs that are already considered tender or marginal for our area. Cover these plants with a 3-4 inches of mulch. This acts like a warm blanket, giving them added winter protection and also helping conserve their moisture, he says.

Other plants that may need to be mulched include any other tender perennials and plants that have been planted or transplanted within the last month or two. Mulching helps protect newly established plants that have not had time to develop a good root system before winter sets in. Unestablished plants can be heaved out of the ground with any freezing-thawing action.

What makes good mulch?

“A number of materials can be used,” Goodspeed says. “Straw is readily available and

inexpensive, but it blows away easily and may contain weed seeds. Dried grass clippings, leaves, sawdust, manure, pine needles, bark chips and peat moss are alternatives.”

He says leaves can be shredded first by going over them with a lawn mower with an attached bag. Sawdust and bark chips can deplete the soil of nitrogen as they break down over the winter and spring. To counteract this, apply about one cup of ammonium sulfate for every 100 square foot of area mulched with these materials.

Even if you don't get around to it until after the ground freezes, mulch will help prevent major frost heaving and may help delay spring growth which is susceptible to frost damage. This is used occasionally on delaying blooming in some bulbs.

“Think of mulching and watering plants as insurance against the possibility of a hard winter, but if it turns out we don't have a hard winter, I don't think any of your plants will complain,” Goodspeed says.

For more information, contact your local [USU County Extension office](#).

Utah State University Extension is an affirmative action/equal employment opportunity employer and educational organization. We offer our program to persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 9 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/10/1998/DF)