

Early Winter Yard Tips

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Prevent insects such as Boxelder bugs, millipedes (one inch small dark worm looking insects), and spiders from invading your home this winter. Caulk around windows, doors, and place screens over attic and exhaust vents. Insects will usually move on when they cannot find an easy entry point. If insects do get inside your home, place a new bag in your vacuum and suck them up. Using a general-purpose insect spray outside the house especially around doors, windows and the foundation, will also keep most insects from coming in.

Putting leaves and other compostable material in the garden and rotor tilling the material in the fall is a good management decision, which adds organic matter to the soil, starts the decomposition process, and is a good weed control measure.

Examine bulbs you purchased this fall and any tender bulbs you are planning to store over winter for fusarium bulb rot. Fusarium bulb rot persists in the soil for an indefinite period of time, causes leaves to yellow, and can lead to the premature death of your plants. Bulbs with fusarium bulb rot will have few or no roots and may fall apart in your hand. Throw away any infected bulbs along with the six inches of soil surrounding the bulb. When storing bulbs, dry them out quickly and be careful not to bruise them. Check stored bulbs periodically for chocolate, blue- gray, or purple-brown spongy decay that is visible when you pull back the outer papery covering of the bulb. You may see white fungal strands as well. Do not purchase bulbs that appear shriveled, show signs of rot, or are soft when pressed lightly. Do not plant bulbs in areas where disease has been a problem in the past. Rotate tender bulb plantings yearly to help prevent diseases from building up in the soil.

Inspect the twigs, branches, and trunks of your trees for insect egg masses. Eastern tent caterpillars, and fall cankerworms all lay egg masses that over winter on trees. Eastern tent caterpillar egg masses can be found on cherries and crabapples encircling small twigs and have a black, varnished appearance. Fall cankerworm egg masses are located in neat rows on small twigs. In addition, there are several scale insects to look for; these are white specs on pine needles, or small bumps on tree branches. If you press on these bumps and they squash then the scale was present. Dormant oil sprays can be used to control the eggs or adults of over wintering insects.

Were voles a problem in your yard this year? Start planning now how to deal with them next year. Voles are mouse-like creatures that burrow along the surface of the soil, eating the roots and stems of bulbs and perennials. Hostas are a good indicator plant since they can be especially hard hit. While you can use baited mousetraps placed under overturned pots, there are other options available such as baits placed in the burrows. Also, when planting new bulbs or perennials, place

them inside one-inch wire mesh cages that go at least 6 inches into the ground. The cages prevent voles from being able to reach your plants. You can also add coarse material such as sharp gravel to your soil when planting. Voles prefer soft organic material and will not dig through the sharp objects. Do not forget you can pick plants that voles do not prefer such as wood hyacinth, fritillaria, and daffodils.

Once everything starts going dormant and losing leaves is a good time to start pruning those perennial plants, not only for structure but diseased limbs. Remember also to make sure all perennials are well watered going into winter.

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