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FRESH COAST GUARDIANS
RESOURCE CENTER

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Fall Landscape Planting & Care

melindamyers.com

FALL IS FOR PLANTING

SPRING FLOWERING BULBS

- Spring flowering bulbs provide early sources of pollen and nectar pollinators
- Reduce maintenance and increase beauty
  - Double up plantings
  - Combine 2 different bulbs that bloom at the same time - double impact
  - Use bulbs that bloom at different times – extend the floral display
- Plant bulbs with hardy pansies and perennials to double or extend bloom
  - Perennials also help mask the declining bulb foliage
- Wildlife resistant and pollinator friendly hardy bulbs
  - Snowdrops, winter aconite, daffodils, hyacinths, grape hyacinths, fritillaria
- Forcing hardy bulbs for indoor enjoyment
  - 12 - 15 weeks of 35-45°F to initiate bloom

TREES AND SHRUBS

- Healthy trees manage storm water
- Warm soil and cool air great for plant establishment
- Select the right plant for the growing conditions
- Make sure the plant will fit the space once mature
- Plant the root flare on trees or crown of shrubs and perennials are at or slightly above the soil surface
- Properly space trees and shrubs for longevity
  - Check the tags for spacing information
  - Fill voids between young shrubs and trees with annuals and perennials
    - Each year you need fewer annuals
    - Dig and move perennials as trees and shrubs grow larger and need the space maturity
- Only prune newly planted trees and shrubs as needed
  - Remove crossing branches, rubbing branches, co-dominant stems
  - Save major pruning – for once plants are established
- More Tree Planting and Care information
  - Watch webinar recording
  - Download handout

PERENNIALS

- Properly prepare the soil when planting perennials
  - Amend soil with compost, aged manure or other organic matter
  - Native Plants 6 weeks before the ground freezes
  - Spring ephemerals - the tops are missing and often sold bare roots
  - Early season bloomers may be past their prime but still a good time to plant
  - Seeds that need a cold period to sprout
  - Mums and asters
    - Alone or with other fall flowers in containers on steps, patio, deck, or balcony
      - Place mums and asters in decorative baskets, pots, or hollowed out pumpkins.
      - Sink the pots in bare spots in the garden for added fall color
    - Use these as permanent additions to perennial beds and shrub borders
    - Increase their survival by leaving them stand for winter and winter mulching
  - Cool weather annuals
    - Rudbeckias, grasses, pansies, stocks,

MMSD

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's (MMSD) mission is to protect public health and the environment.

MMSD is a regional government agency that provides water reclamation and flood management services for over one million people in 29 communities in the Greater Milwaukee Area. Visit **mmsd.com** to learn more about who we are and what we do.

Fresh Coast Guardians is a brand of MMSD centered around our Green Infrastructure initiatives and resources. You can help us prevent polluted storm runoff from reaching our waterways by managing water better when it rains or snows. If you want to learn how you or a business can help us protect Lake Michigan, please visit **freshcoastguardians.com**

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CONTINUE TO WATER AS NEEDED THROUGHOUT THE FALL

Trees, shrubs and perennials suffering from drought stress in fall and early winter are more subject to root damage and subsequently insect pests and disease problems. Drought stress can also contribute to winter dieback and death.

- Fall and Winter Watering
- New plantings, moisture lovers, evergreens and perennials in exposed sites
  - Water thoroughly when the top 4 to 6" of soil are crumbly and moist
- Established trees and shrubs benefit from watering during extended dry periods
- Only water when soil and air temperature are at least 40°F (4.5°C)
  - Apply water during the day when it has time to soak into the soil before freezing

MULCH TREES, SHRUBS AND GARDEN BEDS

- Apply a layer of shredded bark, wood chips, leaves or evergreen needles on the soil surface surrounding plants
  - Conserves moisture
  - Moderates soil temperatures
  - Suppresses weeds
  - Improves the soil as they decompose
- Adding a layer of compost or leaf litter before spreading the mulch is beneficial
- Creating mulch beds around trees and shrubs - without chemicals
  - Edge areas to be mulched
    - This slows the infiltration of grass and weeds
  - Cut the grass and weeds as short as possible
  - Cover with cardboard or newspaper
  - Add a layer of leaves or compost, if desired
  - Cover this with 2 to 3" of wood chips or shredded bark

LEAVE HEALTHY PERENNIALS STAND FOR WINTER

- This includes those in your rain garden, native and ornamental grass plants
- These plants provide winter interest
- Many native bees and pollinators overwinter in hollow stems
- You'll attract songbirds to your landscape with the seed for them to dine upon
- Increases hardiness of the plants for winter survival

DO CUT BACK DISEASED AND INSECT INFESTED PERENNIALS

- Hostas - remove the leaves once the fall color fades
  - Reduce the risk of nematodes and eliminates overwintering homes for slug eggs
  - Do leave the seed heads intact for juncos to eat
- Plants infested with powdery mildew
  - I leave my bee balm for the birds in winter, but my plant pathologist friends recommend cutting these back and disposing of the powdery mildew infected leaves
- Peonies - cut the dead leaves back to the ground
  - Reduces source of powdery mildew as well as botrytis and phytophthora blight
- Remove bearded iris leaf debris that serves as an overwintering site for iris borer

About Melinda

Nationally known gardening expert, TV/radio host, author & columnist Melinda Myers has over 40 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including Can't Miss Small Space Gardening, the recently revised Midwest Gardener's Handbook, and Jackson and Perkins' Beautiful Roses Made Easy. She hosts the nationally-syndicated "Melinda's Garden Moment" program airing on radio stations throughout the U.S. Melinda also hosts the internationally distributed Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD/Instant Video series, including the latest Food Gardening for Everyone DVD set. She is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine, and writes a nationally-distributed gardening column. She appears regularly as a guest expert on national and local television and radio shows.

Visit Melinda's website,
melindamyers.com

- Remove vegetable plant debris, especially:
  - Squash vine borer infested plants
  - Cucumbers killed by bacteria wilt
  - Tomatoes infected with leaf spots and blights
- <u>Disposing of diseased and insect infested plant debris and weeds</u>
  - **Do not compost, unless your pile reaches 150°F to 180°F**
  - Otherwise contact your local municipality for disposal options
  - Solarize in clear plastic bags
  - Burying non soil borne disease material
    - Dig hole in vacant area in the landscape
    - Shred plant debris to speed decomposition
    - Mix this with soil
    - Cover hole with an inch or two of disease-free soil

WHEN TO CUT BACK PERENNIALS

- Wait for several hard frosts when cutting perennials back in fall
  - This allows the plants to store all the energy it has produced in the roots
  - Make the cut 2 to 3" above the soil surface to avoid damaging the crown
- Wait until spring temperatures hover in the 50s for several days before cutting back perennials left standing for winter
  - This allows overwintering beneficial insects a chance to leave their winter homes
    - If you can't wait, stack the trimmings in an out-of-the-way location
    - Mulch or compost the debris later in summer

HOW TO CUT BACK PERENNIALS IN SPRING

- Cut stems back to varying heights between 18 to 24"
  - These dead stems provide nesting cavities for bees
  - New growth will mask these stems
  - The stems will naturally decompose by the following spring
- Use sharp bypass pruners to make a clean cut through the stem
- Hand and power hedge clippers and weed whips with stiff plastic blades make cutting back large plantings and ornamental grasses more efficient
- Bind grasses with large bungee cords before cutting them back to make clean-up much easier

<u>FALL LAWN CARE</u>

- Continue to mow high, as long as the grass continues to grow
- Remove no more than $^1/_3$ the total height
  - Less stressful on the grass
  - Smaller clippings that break down quickly
- Make sure the blades are sharp
  - You will mow faster
  - Use 22% less fuel
  - Lawn will lose up to 30% less water
- Mow over fall leaves and leave them on the lawn
  - Or add a bagger and collect leaves for other uses in the landscape
- Aerate, if needed
- Fall fertilization provides lots of benefits for the lawn
  - Helps lawns recover from summer stress
  - Lawn typically puts down roots in fall and grows denser versus taller

MISS A WEBINAR?

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- Fertilizing with **Milorganite**
  - Early fall, around Labor Day for cool and warm season grasses
  - Again after the first frost, but before the ground freezes for cool season grasses
    - The Milorganite stays in the soil until the soil conditions are right in early spring and the grass comes out of dormancy
- Fertilizing with other products
  - Fall applications will provide the greatest benefits
  - Follow your University Extension recommendations
    - Or, early September is best if doing one fertilization per year
- Sweep or blow grass clippings, fertilizers and any other chemicals off walks, drives and hard surfaces
  - This keeps them out of our storm sewers and waterways

MANAGING FALL LEAVES

- Leaves provide year-round habitat for:
  - Toads
  - Bumblebees and more
- Always easier to manage and move fall leaves when dry
- Mow over and leave fall leaves on the lawn
  - Small pieces, the size of a quarter, won't harm the grass
  - The leaves add organic matter and nutrients to the soil
- Use as mulch on the soil around perennials and shrubs or to cover bare soil in vacant gardens
  - Pull mulch away from shrub stems and crowns of perennial plants
- Shred and dig into new or annual garden beds in fall
  - The leaves break down over winter, adding organic matter to and improving the soil
- Recycle by adding extra leaves to the compost pile

START COMPOSTING

- Do compost:
  - Landscape trimmings
    - Free of insect pests and disease
  - Annual weeds that have not gone to flower or seed
  - Plant-based kitchen scraps
  - Worm castings
- Do not compost:
  - Weeds gone to flower or seed
  - Perennial weeds and invasive plants
  - Diseased or insect infested plant trimmings
  - Meat, fat, bones and dairy

PILE COMPOST

- Place these items in a heap and they will eventually decompose
- The more work you put into composting, the faster you will have results
- How to:
  - Place compost pile in an area with:
    - Good drainage
    - Easy access to add materials, harvest finished compost and water as needed
    - Sunny locations will decompose quicker, but dry out faster
    - Shady locations stay moist longer, but decompose slower

- Assemble the pile
  - *Optional* - bottom layer of twigs and branches or pallet covered with hardware cloth for drainage
  - Start with an 8 to 10" layer composed of nitrogen-rich (greens) and carbon-rich (browns) material that will break down more quickly than a random mix
    - Browns: fall leaves, dried plant debris, cornstalks and straw
    - Greens: plant-based food scraps, herbicide-free grass clippings and fresh vegetable trimmings
  - Cover this with finished compost or soil
  - Sprinkle the surface with 3 cups of Milorganite
    - The nitrogen and 85% organic matter in Milorganite helps feed the microorganisms that break down the raw materials into compost
  - Repeat the layering until the pile is as least 3' high and wide
  - Cover the top and edges with browns
  - Moisten the pile to the consistency of a damp sponge
  - *Optional* - cover with plastic if you are gardening in an area subject to heavy and frequent rain
  - Turn the pile after several days
    - Move less decomposed material on the outer edges to the center
    - Move the more decomposed material from the center to outer edge
  - Repeat as time allows
  - Harvest finished compost when crumbly and brown
- Compost bins are used to mask the composting process and contain the pile
  - 2 and 3 bins systems or those that can be removed make turning the pile easier
  - Tumblers make turning the pile easier
    - Consider using 2 or purchasing a dual bin composter
    - This allows you to stockpile the trimmings in one bin while actively composting in the other
      - This speeds up the process

- <u>Trench Composting</u>
  - Dig a 12" deep hole or trench between rows of plants, in pathways or any vacant space
  - Add kitchen scraps and plant trimmings
  - Mix with soil
  - Cover with at least 8" of soil to reduce the risk of animals digging
- <u>The Greiten Method</u>
  - Named for my friend Ray Greiten, who taught me this technique
  - Create slightly raised, 4' wide beds by raking soil from either side
  - The sunken space between these beds will be the pathways
  - Place plant trimmings in the pathway throughout the summer
    - These act as a mulch, suppressing weeds
    - As you walk over the plant trimmings, you help break them down
  - At the end of the season, rake the raised bed soil from the middle to the paths on either side of the raised bed. This helps complete the composting over winter
  - Next year the path will be the new raised bed and the raised beds will be the path

- You have grown vegetables, composted and rotated plantings in a relatively small area

PREVENT WINTER DAMAGE

- Upright evergreens
  - Loosely tie the upright stems on arborvitae and junipers
    - Prevents snow and ice bending and breaking stems
    - Use cloth strips or netting
- Winter wind and sun damage on evergreens
  - Evergreens continue to lose moisture throughout the winter
  - Shelter plants from wind and sun to reduce moisture loss
- Winter mulch
  - Protect borderline hardy perennials
  - Helps prevent frost heaving
  - Apply after the ground freezes
  - Cover with straw or evergreen boughs
- Protect plants from deicing salt
  - Shovel first and then apply salt, if needed
  - Use plant-friendly deicers
  - Screen plants subject to salt spray
  - In spring, water thoroughly to wash salt away from plant roots

PROTECT PLANTINGS FROM HUNGRY CRITTERS

- Fencing is the most effective, but not always practical
  - Bury the bottom 4 to 6" of fencing to keep out voles
  - Use at least 4' high fences for rabbits
  - 5 to 6' high around small garden beds for deer
  - Make sure the gate is secure
  - Fishing line on decorative posts has worked for deer
    - String the first line 18" above the ground, then every 2'
- Scare tactics
  - Urban and suburban animals are not easily scared
  - Motion sensitive sprinklers seem to provide decent results
  - Move and change scare tactics to increase effectiveness
- Repellents use taste or odor to repel animals
  - Apply repellents before animals begin damaging the plants for best results
  - Apply to access points to keep them out
  - Plantskydd is organic and rain and snow resistant, so you need to apply less often
- DIY repellents
  - Make sure they are safe for plants, environment, pets and people
- Monitor, adjust and consider using a variety of strategies

Contact Diggers Hotline or your local underground utility locating service BEFORE you start digging - It's a FREE service

In Wisconsin file online at **diggershotline.com** or anywhere in the U.S., including Wisconsin, call 811 at least 3 business days before putting the first shovel in the ground. Once your request is received, Diggers Hotline (or your local locating service) contacts all the appropriate underground utilities. The utility's locators will mark the location of the underground utilities in the work area. Avoid digging near the marks to reduce the risk of damage, personal injury or even death.

DIGGERS HOTLINE®

FALL CARE FOR YOUR RAIN BARRELS

- Check your gutters and remove any debris. If present, check and remove any debris from your downspout diverter
- When temperatures fall below 40°F:
  - Remove any leaves that collected on top of the rain barrel
  - Empty the water and use to water ornamental plants
  - Spray the inside of the barrel with water to remove any debris
  - Turn the rain barrel upside down and store in shed, garage or basement
  - Replace the diverter with the winter cap or the downspout extension as needed

OVERWINTERING HARDY TREES, SHRUBS AND PERENNIALS GROWING IN CONTAINERS

- Move to a sheltered outdoor location and insulate roots with annual pots, wood chips, shredded bark, bags of leaves…
- Group plants together and mulch with wood chips or shredded bark
- Heel in
  - Dig trench, place pot in trench and cover pot with soil
- Move containers into an unheated garage
  - Provide additional root insulation
  - Water when soil is thawed and dry
  - Consider treating for voles that might winter in the garage

OVERWINTERING NON-HARDY "BULBS"

- Dig after leaves yellow or frost kills the leaves
- Cure
  - Place in a warm, dry location
  - This allows "bulbs" to close wounds and prepare for storage
    - Cannas - overnight, store covered
    - Dahlias - several hours, store covered
    - Callas - 1 to 2 days, store covered
    - Caladiums - several days, store covered
    - Tuberous begonias - several days, store covered
    - Gladiolus - several weeks, store uncovered
- Store in a cool, dark location

OVERWINTERING HIBISCUS, MANDEVILLA, AND OTHER TROPICALS

- Grow as a houseplant
- Move to a cool, bright location with minimal watering
- Allow to go dormant in cool locations
  - Water just enough to prevent roots from drying

UPCOMING APPEARANCES & WEBINARS

Check often as more appearances and webinars continue to be added.

September 26th

Pasquesi Home and Gardens

- *How to Prune Hydrangeas and Other Favorite Shrubs*
- *Q&A Session*

October 22nd

Wauwatosa Public Library

- *Growing Flavorful Herbs & A Few Veggies Indoors*

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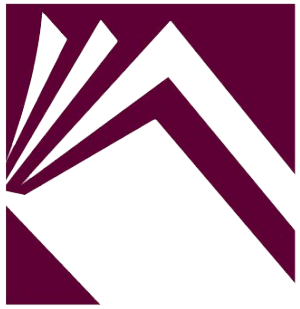

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