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national authority on horticulture

it's time to put your garden to bed

By R. M. Carleton

Your yard and garden should be "put to bed" for the winter to help it do a better job next year. First to need attention is usually your vegetable garden. Pull up the old plants at once and put on the compost heap. They will soon return to humus and loam.

Now is also the time to raise low spots so water won't stand. Remove the top 12" of soil and throw it to one side. Now fill the hole you've dug with a layer of leaves a foot or more thick, or with old plants from the vegetable garden. Throw the earth back over this fill. By spring, the vegetable matter will have rotted, and the fill settled. It should be three or four inches higher than it was.

Tops of peonies and irises, as well as most of the perennials, can be cut off and dumped on the compost heap, or used to fill low spots in the vegetable garden. If peonies have been losing their buds before they can bloom in spring, now is the time to correct this difficulty. As soon as the stalks have been cut off, spray the ground over the clump with a strong solution of Bordeaux mixture. This kills the fungus that causes the browning of the buds. Don't use a mulch over peonies: the fungus thrives in the mulch. Most perennials will do better with a mulch, however.

Don't apply mulching materials until the ground freezes. Otherwise, field mice (who love the airy protected shelter) will move in and set up housekeeping. Since they dine all winter on perennials near their runs, they can do tremendous damage by spring. If the ground is frozen, they won't cause trouble.

The lawn should be mowed once before the final winter freeze-up. If allowed to go into winter with long and matted grass, disease will probably kill out large areas of turf. Snow mould, a fungus disease that works under snow, is always worse where the grass is long and matted. If you have had trouble with snow mould, apply a spray of 6 oz. of Tersan to 1,000 square feet, to kill the fungus.

Your garden tools will need attention. First, get rid of dirt on hoes, rakes and spades by wire brushing or soaking. Sharpen any dull edges with a file. Paint handles a distinctive color so they can be recognized at a distance.

The last outdoor task of the year is seed sowing. In soil prepared earlier, you may sow Larkspur, Bachelor Buttons, Pansies, Violas, Delphinium, small-flowered Petunias, Poppies and Pinks. These will lay dormant until spring, and start to grow early as soon as the weather warms up a bit. Long before you could dig in spring, seedlings of these annuals and perennials will be growing well.



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