
PERENNIALS IN WINTER

HUMBER NURSERIES “GREEN THUMB GUIDE”



CUTTING BACK PERENNIALS IN THE FALL

Not all our perennials are truly herbaceous with the entire plant dying down to the ground with frost. Many remain partially or totally evergreen – *Bergenia*, *Arabis*, *Aubretia*, *Heuchera*, Thyme and many more. These can all be left to good winter effect.

Even those with herbaceous foliage often have seed heads that can be attractive in winter and provide food for birds.

Foliage of Yucca and Red Hot Poker are best tied up to protect the crown of the plant. Most ornamental grasses are superb in the winter garden.

It is much more natural to leave plants standing into winter just as Mother Nature does.

So what do we cut down? And why?

All perennials, even those with winter foliage, can be cut down in the fall. This certainly presents a neater garden and allows for the addition of a protective mulch in areas where a snow cover is not dependable.

Plants that harbour fungus spores should certainly have the foliage removed and succulent foliage such as Iris or Daylily leaves that are only going to rot in winter are much better removed.

The reason for our action is always important.

Some plants can benefit by being cut down to almost ground level in fall to encourage the growth of offsets, for a superior plant the next year. This is particularly true in the plant's first year and helps to “perennialize” those with a reputation of being short lived.

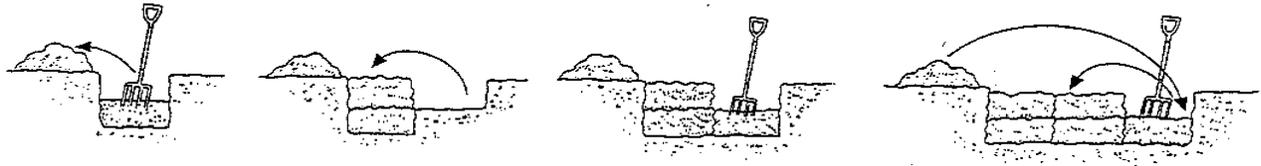
WINTER SUCCESS DEPENDS ON GOOD DRAINAGE

Good drainage and a thick blanket of snow will see most hardy perennials safely through the winter.

The snow cover is beyond our control but good drainage is our responsibility. Many perennials can succumb to winter wet, even those listed as extremely hardy.

Initial thorough preparation of the soil in beds or borders is essential.

Many people are aware of double digging but very few actually put it into practice.



DOUBLE DIGGING

- Dig out a trench 30 cm or more deep and set aside.
- Dig and turn over the next foot of soil
- Add 15 cm of compost or composted manure and fork under
- The soil from the next trench is piled on top of the first
- Again dig the subsoil and add 15 cm of composted manure
- Repeat trenching and forking in compost to the width of the bed
- To fill the last trench use the soil that was first set aside

PREPARATION OF GARDEN BEDS IS BEST DONE IN THE FALL READY FOR SPRING PLANTING

The resulting well-dug bed should now be at least 15 cm higher than its surrounds and can be increased to 30 cm by the addition of purchased garden soil to achieve an overall cultivated depth of nearly 90 cm. The good tilth of soil creates drainage and aeration. As the roots penetrate down to the rich mixture of manure or compost in the lowest level they will find both moisture and nutrients.

IMPROVING THE SOIL OF EXISTING BEDS

When you cut back and remove all the dying vegetation in the fall you are removing much of the material that would naturally be recycled by the plants.

To keep borders of perennial plants growing vigorously they must have adequate nutrients – a 'Winterizing' high potassium formula in the fall and an all purpose balanced fertilizer in spring.

Essential as these plant foods are, they do nothing to improve soil texture.

Pelletized Gypsum is an excellent soil amendment which causes the fine particles of clay soil to aggregate into larger clumps for better drainage. This is spread evenly over the soil and worked in to a depth of several cm.

Compost or composted manure are ideal for improving soil textures and adding required nutrients. When applied in fall to a depth of 5 to 10 cm and before any other mulch, added winter protection is also provided.

Organic Mulches include Bark Nuggets, Shredded Bark, Cocoa Bean Shells and other materials of vegetable matter. When applied to a depth of at least 5 cm a mulch will stabilize soil temperatures during winter freezing and thawing and conserve moisture in all seasons.

When the mulch contacts the soil there will be a normal process of decay which adds organic content to the soil and additional applications will be required from time to time.

Mulching lessens the need for constant weeding and dresses the garden bed.

HUMBER NURSERIES LTD.

Ontario's Largest Garden Centre

8386 Hwy 50, Brampton, Ontario L6T 0A5

Ph: 416-798-TREE (8733) Ph: 905-794-0555 Fax: 905-794-1311

www.humburnurseries.com humber@gardencentre.com

Get all of your gardening questions answered through the 'Ask the Experts' link on our website



Find us on Facebook



Follow us on Twitter