

Winter Care of Perennials

Due to changes in our climate over the past few years, these numbers have changed quite a bit. For instance, in 2005 most of the Oklahoma region was in the "6b" to "7a" range.

However, don't let these broad numbers for our region deter you from getting the most from your winter landscape. If you keep the word "prep" in mind and follow these steps during the growing season and well into the fall, you're more likely guaranteed to have a healthy winter garden:

Make your plants more resilient

Plants are more resilient when they are fertilized as needed. Avoid over fertilizing plants and fertilizing beyond mid to late August, as this will give them time to naturally acclimate to the cooler soil temperatures in the fall that precede much colder winter conditions. Improve drainage for plants that are grown in wet or soggy soils by amending the soil with organic matter. This will help the roots be able to breathe better.

Trim shrubs, trees and perennials

Most shrubs, trees and perennials do well when they are cut back at the end of the growing season; typically in late September or early to mid-October. However, hostas, ornamental grasses, crepe myrtles and other perennials do well with a nice trim in early spring. After trimming, remove all of the debris in order to minimize soil-borne diseases from spreading

Plant shrubs in their pots

If you haven't decided on a space for your shrub(s) and they are still in their pots, dig a trench deep enough to cover the entire pot. Set the plants side-by-side in the trench. Carefully cover with soil and water deeply, making certain to remove any air pockets and get the roots moist. Check for dryness and continue to water as needed throughout the winter.

Protect perennials from wicked winter weather

During the fall, provide an ample layer of mulch. Mulching protects the crowns of plants from the extreme weather conditions. Make certain to wait until the ground gets a bit colder before you do this so the plants have time to naturally acclimate to cooler ground conditions. Early to mid-November works well for our zone. Even though there's a bit of frost on the ground, mulching will serve you well. Try using shredded bark, wood chips, pine or leaves and layer 4-6 inches deep. NOTE: There is no need to mulch bearded iris, as the iris borer is a menace on mulched plants. Note that this borer may also affect peonies as well.

Continue to water throughout winter

Perennials need watering, even during winter months, as are times throughout the winter where we experience several dry weeks. Check your garden and, if the soil is dry beyond one or two inches below the surface, give the area a thorough watering.

Divide and conquer

We've all heard this term and perennials can be divided or relocated in either the fall or early spring. Rule of thumb: If a perennial blooms in the spring/early summer, divide and move it in the fall; If it blooms in late summer or early fall, divide and move it in the spring. Some exceptions are irises and daylilies which prefer division in August and the handful of plants that have taproots don't want to be touched at all.

Remove and refresh the mulch in spring

Once the threat of frost is no longer present, remove the mulch and rake it back or simply use your hands to pull back part of the mulch and leave at least 2-3 inches. Utilizing these key points and taking a bit your time to execute your plan will ensure a beautiful winter garden that's ready for spring. Your garden will respond in kind.