

Fall Flowerbed Preparation

The fall show in the garden feels like an encore performance for many. After much of the excitement of summer blooming has faded, we ask our players for another chorus or two before we can close down the theater until next year's opening.

The above-ground performance is so engaging that it's easy to forget the importance of the unsung hero: the soil bed itself. It's the stage, the theater . . . the platform, if you will. Yes, of course, plants require air, light, water and soil to survive and thrive. But, without the foundation of good soil and bed preparation, the show is doomed to bad reviews.

So, when breaking down the set of your garden theater in the fall, here are some suggestions for preparing the beds after the last encore

Sanitation

A healthy environment and strong plants are the first line of resistance to disease and insect infestation, so head them off with proper sanitation. Remove and discard debris and diseased material. But, do not put in the compost pile; it is best to burn diseased woody material if at all possible. When pruning, disinfect tools with a 10% bleach/water solution to control the spread of pathogens. Weeding is a form of disease control. It not only removes undesired plants before they can seed, but can also increase air flow, a component of a healthy growing environment. Read more about controlling disease in the home garden in [OSU Extension Fact Sheet EPP-7652](#).

Enrichment and Protection

Every three years a soil test should be performed. This nutrient analysis should guide your fertilization program. Avoid tilling when the soil is very wet or dry; instead, try a once-yearly cultivation plan to add and preserve organic matter composition in the soil. [E-1003 \(Oklahoma Homeowner's Handbook for Soil and Nutrient Management\)](#) is a comprehensive guide explaining everything from soil composition basics to pH and nutrient info to organic material management to fertilization and soil test interpretation. And, as the season progresses, consider winter mulching your beds with organic matter to help prevent weeds and erosion, to protect plant crowns, and to retain moisture, all while providing additional nutrients and improved soil condition to our largely organic matter-deficient Oklahoma soil.

In fall and winter, after the show is over, much activity goes on beneath the mulch. Help develop and foster strong roots and healthy spring growth with proper soil and bed preparation beginning in the fall. This will pay big dividends and ensure better results when the first spring bulbs arrive.