

Andy's Garden



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Fall Pruning

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Even in colder climates, it can be nice to leave some perennials standing throughout the fall and winter months. The seeds of Echinacea and Rudbeckia will attract and feed the birds: Sedum will hold onto snow like frosting. There are also plants that like the protection their foliage provides for their crowns. Asclepias (Butterfly Weed), Chrysanthemums and Heuchera (Coral Bells) fare best if cleaned up in the spring. But some perennials don't handle rough weather well. They won't remain attractive after frost and they have recurrent problems with pests and diseases, which will over winter in their fallen foliage and surface in the spring. These perennial flowers are best cut down in the fall. If they are diseased, throw the foliage away, do not compost it. There will always be exceptions and time will play a factor. No one can really pinpoint when frost and snow will come. Many gardens survive just fine with no attention at all in the fall. Consider this listing as a guideline. You will learn what works and what doesn't, for your own garden.

Perennial Plants to Prune in the Fall

Bearded Iris The tall foliage of bearded iris begins flopping early in the season. By fall, it's cover for iris borers and fungal diseases. Cut back after a killing frost and it would be wise to dispose of the foliage, rather than composting.

Beebalm (Monarda didyma) Even the most resistant varieties of Monarda can succumb to mildew. When that happens, you'll be cutting them back long before fall. Fresh, new growth can be left on until spring. Sometimes selective thinning of the stems is all that is needed and you can leave the remaining seed heads for the birds.

Blanket Flower (Gaillardia x grandiflora) Gaillardia is a pretty hardy plant, but cutting back the spent stems seems to improve its hardiness even more, by improving its vigor.

Columbine (Aquilegia) Remove any foliage showing leaf miner damage and remove any debris around the base of the plants. Aquilegia send out growth early in spring and appreciate not having the old foliage to contend with.

Daylily (Hemerocallis) Daylilies respond well to shearing and unless you are in an area where they remain somewhat evergreen, fall pruning will save you a messy cleanup in the spring.

Hardy Bergonia (Bergonia grandis) Frost will blacken and collapse the foliage of Bergonia. If left at the base of the plant, it can cause crown rot. Prevent this by cutting back in the fall.

Helianthus (Perennial varieties) H. x laetiflorus, H. salicifolium... The perennial members of the sunflower family usually finish blooming toward the end of summer and go down hill from there. Deadheading does not improve their appearance and the tall stems are guaranteed to break and flop. Cut back to ground for aesthetics.

Peony (Paeonia) Peonies need a period of cold to set buds for the following season. That coupled with the fact that their foliage is extremely prone to mildew is reason enough to remove the foliage in the fall. Infected foliage can be removed and disposed of in late summer. Healthy foliage will turn golden in fall and can be removed once it has turned to mush, after the first frost.

Salvia (Salvia nemorosa) Perennial Salvia benefits from several prunings during the growing season. In fall when blooming slows, cut the whole plant back to the new basal growth.

Wild Indigo (Baptisia australis) Baptisia is one of those plants that splits in the middle if not sheared back after pruning, however many gardeners like the seed pods and simply stake the plants. Come frost, the foliage turns black and even staking isn't going to help its appearance. Cut back for aesthetics.

Yarrow (Achillea) Achillea don't like to sit in cold, wet soil. By fall, most of their blooms are spent and the foliage is flopping and possibly diseased. Cut back in early fall and new basil growth with fill in before frost.

