

Preparing Perennials for Fall and Winter

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Summer can come to end gradually, or abruptly, in Teller County. You've given your perennial garden time, attention and affection, and want to ensure that your plants will survive through the upcoming autumn and winter seasons. These hardy, flowering plants can give you many years of joy if you take the correct steps to prepare them for each seasonal change.

I started a perennial rock garden last year in front of my home. The penstemon and sedum survived their first winter. This year I added several more perennial varieties including poppies, catmint, columbine, hens and chicks, gaillardia, and a few different varieties of penstemon (my favorite perennial.) Most have flourished despite the deer, squirrels, and the dry month of June.

Since it is important they come back even stronger and larger next spring, I'll be taking the following steps late this summer to increase their chances for survival and success.

It is good to keep cutting off the spent flowers, which is known as deadheading. Deadheading serves two purposes: it keeps plants looking attractive and it stops seed production (once a plant produces mature seeds, flowering declines.) Different plants respond to different methods but the general rule is to remove spent blossoms, making sure you also remove the developing seed pod, often located at the center or just behind the flower. In other words, don't just pull off the petals.

It is not necessary to cut back your perennials since their foliage can be beautiful in the autumn and winter and can add visual interest when the flowers are gone and the meadows are brown.

I will keep my perennial garden area clean of debris to prevent disease, insects, and rodents. Any plant parts left from pruning or cutting out diseased foliage will be removed. Continued weeding will help deter the return of those weeds. If you compost, make sure to throw out the diseased materials since you won't want to spread the disease into next year's plants.

Hopefully your summer perennial garden already has a nice layer of mulch. Mulch is the best protection you can give your perennials year round. It insulates your plants from the vast temperature changes we go through in the high country and also holds moisture. I will check to see if I need to increase or refresh the mulch already there with an optimal depth of 3-4 inches.

Of course, continued watering is critical for perennials; especially since the weather at summer's end and through winter tend to be very dry. And, don't be afraid of that first

early snowfall; it can bring much needed moisture for your garden bed and also acts as a great insulator through the winter months.

To find out more information please visit the following websites.

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/07402.html> - Perennial Gardening

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/07214.html> - Mulches

For questions regarding produce, landscape, and horticulture questions; please contact the Teller County, Colorado Master Gardener grow line at 686-7980, visit our website at www.co.teller.co.us/csu or visit our booth at the Woodland Park farmers' market.