

With the onset of cool weather, now is the time to winterize our gardens. All aspects of the garden, from bulbs to the irrigation system need some attention as we near winter.

Any spring-flowering bulbs that flowered less profusely this year than last could benefit from division. Dig, divide and replant or share as necessary. Spring-flowering bulbs may also benefit from a good fall feeding of bulb fertilizer. Tender summer-flowering bulbs such as dahlias should be dug now, to prevent frost damage and rot. Store in a barrel of slightly dampened sawdust in a cool, dark location such as a basement.

In addition to bulbs, perennials can use a little attention this time of year. Trim them back to tidy, then add a little additional mulch over their crowns to protect them through the winter months. If necessary, divide perennials and spread throughout the garden, or share extras with gardening friends. Incorporate any new perennials your friends pass to you, or those you find on the sale rack at the local garden center.

Prepare trees and shrubs for winter by pulling mulch away from the trunks so that voles and other critters do not have a place where they can hide, and feed on the trunk's bark. If in years past any of your trees or shrubs have suffered windburn during the winter, consider transplanting them to a better location now, or add a wind block of burlap and wooden stakes next to them. Make certain to keep all trees and shrubs, particularly evergreens, well watered during windy, dry periods. Avoid pruning until the plants have gone dormant, as pruning this time of year may encourage late season growth that could become frost damaged.

Get a jump on a great lawn for next year by aerating and then top dressing with ½" of good quality compost. This will add organic matter to the soil, making your lawn more drought tolerant next year. This is also the time to fertilize cool-season turfgrasses. Fertilize according to the SOD principle, in September, October and December. If necessary, overseed to fill in bare areas. If broadleaf weeds were a problem this summer, October and November is a great time to treat them. Apply a broadleaf weed killer now, for less weeds next summer.

Save your terra cotta pots from frost damage by taking them indoors for the winter, or turning them upside so that water does not fill them, freeze and crack the pots.

Also be sure to disconnect all hoses at the hose bib on the house. Drain hoses and store them off the ground or indoors. Winterize your irrigation system by flushing all the water from the system to prevent damage from freezing. If you have an irrigation specialist come to winterize your system, have them add a rain sensor, or if you already have one, have it adjusted so that next season the irrigation system will turn off after ¼" of rain has been received.

With a little work you can put your garden to rest for the winter, and next season when it awakens once again, you will be thankful for the efforts you made this fall.

Albemarle County Service Authority will be having a public hearing Thursday, November 20 at 9 am at 168 Spotnap Road to discuss a pending change to the Rules and Regulation that would require all irrigation systems installed after December 1, 2003 to have a rain sensor, and all existing irrigation systems to have a rain sensor by July 1, 2004. Anyone with question or concerns regarding this pending change is encouraged to attend the public hearing.