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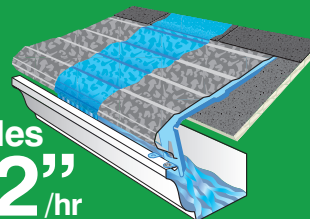
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Pre-winter perennial pruning pointers

Foliage and football might be two things people instantly associate with fall, but there's more to this beloved season than brightly colored leaves and action on the gridiron.

Gardeners know that spring is an ideal time to plan and plant their favorite flowers and most flavorful fruits and vegetables. However, seasoned gardeners know that gardening is a year-round commitment. Pruning is one of the keys to keeping perennials coming back for years to come, and fall is an ideal time to take on this important task.

Pruning perennials in the fall is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. According to the Old Farmer's Almanac, some perennials can be cut down after the first killing frost, while others can be left to benefit wildlife, including birds and insects. Understanding pruning and when to do it this fall can help gardeners lay a strong foundation for their gardens that will benefit them next spring.

Why should some perennials be pruned?

The College of Agricultural Sciences at Pennsylvania State University notes that perennials that have become diseased or infested with insects are pruned to prevent those problems from resurfacing in the spring. In addition, according to the Old Farmer's Almanac, many herbaceous perennials have old foliage and

dying stems after several hard frosts. If dead foliage or dying stems aren't pruned, disease, slugs and other pests can overwinter in the plants. Cutting these plants down to the ground after several hard frosts allows the base of the plant to remain dormant over the winter but makes the plant less hospitable to disease and insects.

Which perennials should I prune?

The first step to pruning perennials is to recognize which need to be pruned and which can be left intact for the winter. The Old Farmer's Almanac notes that bee balm and phlox are prone to powdery mildew and should be cut back once they're gone. Hostas harbor slug eggs, so they, too, should be pruned after a hard frost. Hosta leaves that have fallen on the ground should be removed as well. There's no need to cut back certain perennials if they're healthy. For example, hardy geraniums do not require pruning in the fall, and Penn State Extension notes that hardy perennials like garden mums are more likely to survive a cold winter if they're left intact. That's because the tops of such plants will collect leaves and snow for insulation and moisture over the course of winter. Gardeners who are unsure about fall pruning can speak with their local gardening center for additional advice regarding which plants to cut back before winter.



When to prune perennials

Gardeners need not rush to prune perennials in the fall. Diseased or infested plants can be pruned at the first sight of disease or infestation, but gardeners can wait until several hard frosts have occurred before they prune healthy perennials. In gardening parlance, a hard frost refers to when temperatures drop below 28 F. Several hard frosts kill the uppermost growth of most perennials, making this an ideal time to prune them.

Pruning perennials in fall can be the first step toward creating an awe-inspiring spring garden.

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5 Tips for Remodeling in Today's Market

(Family Features) In the aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdown, labor shortages and access to certain products affects numerous industries, including remodeling. Even so, after extra time at home and delays caused by the pandemic, there is high demand for home renovation projects.

If you're planning a home remodel or construction project, consider these tips from professional remodelers to avoid frustration and ensure your vision comes to life.

Do Research and Plan Ahead

Mapping out your project early and thoroughly can help you avoid delays. This is especially important when it comes to materials, said John Brown of Bliffert Lumber and Hardware.

"The quicker a homeowner can make selections, the sooner we can get it on order and get it in," Bliffert said.

Some contractors are adjusting the way they approach planning to offset delays. For example, selecting materials and finishes at the outset, instead of as you progress through the project like you normally would, may mean the materials are available when you need them.

"The design process has really changed," said Robi Kirsic of TimeLine Renovation and Design. "We're still designing based on homeowners' wishes

and dreams, but we're also modifying by providing options based on what's available."

Know Where You're Willing to Compromise

Whether you're able or willing to compromise often comes down to why you're doing the renovation in the first place.

"Some homeowners are specific about what they want," Kirsic said. "They've been waiting for a long time to do this project and they're not doing it to compromise. Others have a time constraint for one reason or another; they don't have the luxury of waiting."

It's a sentiment echoed by others, who caution that you may be able to get an item you have your heart set on, but you may need to be willing to wait.

"If you have your heart set on a certain bathtub, it might be a 6- or 8-month wait, but another one might be available sooner," said Jason Hensler of Marvin Windows and Doors.

Avoid Making Changes

Once your plans are set and your materials have been ordered, avoid unnecessary delays by changing your project scope or material selection. In this environment, project timelines are extremely tight and even minor changes can create significant disrupt-



tions, especially if there's a delay in obtaining different materials or your new ideas require a different crew that wasn't already scheduled for your job.

Choose a Trustworthy Partner

While these are unusual times, having a reliable contractor can make the project run more smoothly and help you feel more comfortable as the project progresses.

"Use someone you trust, someone who is part of a reputable group like the National Association of the Remodeling Industry," Brown said.

That way, if you encounter unexpected bumps along the way, you can be confident they will be handled professionally and appropriately.

Brown encourages his teams to communicate early and often, which helps homeowners understand and trust they're doing everything possible to keep the job on track.

Be Patient

Above all, understanding these are unusual times can go a long way toward a more successful project.

"Patience will help it go a lot smoother," Hensler said. "That may mean accepting longer wait times than you anticipated and a later completion date than you hoped."

The sooner you get your project started, the sooner your contractor can start mapping out a project timeline. Find contractors in your area at RemodelingDoneRight.com.

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