

Julia Sudnitskaya/stock.adobe.com

Winter IS COMING

There is something ritualistic about getting the garden ready for winter. Everything is going to sleep and in that final tidy up you are preparing the now dormant garden for new life next spring. Just hold that positive thought when you are clearing pile upon pile of leaves, which incidentally is the first job to be completed in our winter tidy up!

Words: Kirsty Mclean

Give the lawn a good rake with a springbok rake and aerate either with a garden fork or you can buy a tool that does this specifically.

If you have the space, compost these in bins, bought or built it doesn't matter. If you don't have space for dedicated bins, put the leaves into plastic bin liners and perforate the bags to let the air circulate. Next year you can use the leaf mould as a mulch on the borders, which will help to keep the soil from being compacted by hard rains and keep the moisture in when it's dry. Tender perennials and bulbs near to the surface will benefit from a good layer of mulch to protect them through the winter months too and as a general soil improver it does a great job.

Some of us want to cut seed heads down and make things neat and tidy and others prefer to leave these through the winter, enjoying the forms and colour they provide in the winter borders. If you are on the tidy side, perhaps the compromise would be to tidy the borders that are in your main view but leave one? The wildlife would be grateful to you for the winter shelter and food and in turn will help to keep the balance of nature in your garden next season. Don't forget to put out feed and water for the birds too!

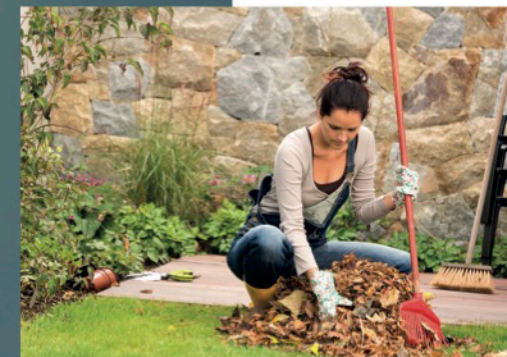
At the first sign of frosts, protect your smaller non-hardy plants and winter tender bulbs by potting them up and storing these somewhere warmer for the winter. Larger tender plants that cannot or do not like to be moved can be protected using clothes, hessian or horticultural fleece.

Give the lawn a good rake with a springbok rake and aerate either with a garden fork or you can buy a tool that does this specifically. After raking and aerating, and while the grass is still short from recent mowing, spread a thin layer of top dressing evenly all over the surface, and work it in with a stiff broom. I like to add in sharp sand/builders sand, which is gritty and helps to open up the soil below, especially if it's prone to moss.

Regular top-dressing is the only way to improve the soil under an existing lawn; if the soil is seriously poor, you can top-dress in both Spring and Autumn for quicker results. You can also use several small regular applications of top dressing to fill in hollows or to help even up bumpy lawns.

Prune deciduous shrubs and trees and if you're not sure how to do this, I can recommend purchasing a copy of 'The Pruner's Handbook' by John Malins, published by David & Charles. Very helpful!

The last touch might be to add a little bit of colour by planting winter bedding. Even winter pansies dotted about the garden can lift the spirits on a cold, damp winters day.



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