



# FALL IS FOR PLANTING; GUIDELINES FOR RENEWABLE LANDSCAPES

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Autumn is a perfect time for landscape renewal. Moderate temperatures and warm soils are beneficial for establishing trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs. And there's no better time to put in a new perennial border or to add additional shrubbery or trees to your landscape. Here are a few steps for successful fall gardening.

When planting in Colorado, take the time to amend the soil with compost. Soil amendment improves the texture of clay soil and improves drainage and moisture retention in either clay or sandy soils. Another advantage for planting in the fall is autumn's drier soil, which is less prone to compaction compared to soil in spring when the weather is wetter.

Before beginning, water plants well to help avoid transplant stress. If you have perennials with excessive top growth cut them down in size so their energy goes to root development. If you're adding trees and shrubs be sure to water them thoroughly. Check the soil every few days for moisture by checking the soil next to the root ball to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. If the soil is moist, there's no need to water. When the soil has dried, water thoroughly. As a rule, a thorough watering every 5 to 7 days is sufficient to establish new plantings.

Early fall, from mid-September through the end of October is an excellent time to make or remake a perennial bed or border. Bed renewal is a key project and for best results start by planning. The objective most likely is to plant fresh plants where others have weakened or declined. This is a great time to divide and rejuvenate crowded clumps of plants or to rearrange or transplant poorly placed plants. Try to keep your project workable, focus on about 10 to 20 feet of a bed or border at a time. Begin by evaluating the bed, taking note of robust or flourishing plants and leaving them alone if possible. Avoid disturbing plants such as gas plant (*Dictamnus*), baby's breath



(Gypsophila), false indigo (Baptisia) and peonies (unless they are in need of moving or division). Once you've identified what's working and what needs to be moved, begin cutting back the foliage by half. Most perennials divide easily in the autumn. Using a good spading fork, lift the clumps from the soil without damaging roots. A good division will have several strong shoots with plenty of roots to support new growth. Then lift the clumps of perennials, place them in containers, boxes or plastic bags; put them in a cool shady spot and keep them moist. Next, spade the area, removing weeds, add 2 inches of compost, a dusting of super phosphate and spade again to incorporate thoroughly. Rake the area smooth and recompose the plants in the garden.

*As you renew beds and borders consider the following;*

- Include perennials for each season for a succession of bloom.
- Assess heights, shapes, textures, flower and foliage color for contrast and interest.
- Consider the edging plants as well as the background plants.
- Vary the contour with structural form: rounded, bushy, erect, vertical, layered or irregular.
- Use individual kinds of plants in groups of three or more for best effect. Select some single specimen plants for use as focal points.
- Plant bulbs at this time in some spaces and plan for adding annuals as well.

Garden clean-up in the fall is every gardener's choice. There are really no hard and fast rules but perhaps a few guidelines. Any foliage with powdery mildew or rust should be removed from the garden and discarded. As perennials finish flowering you may choose to remove the flowering stems down to the base foliage. This cleans up the plant and makes for a tidy appearance. The basal foliage, however should remain intact, it helps protect the crown of the plants and is often persistent or evergreen adding appeal into the winter. In many instances the seed head remains sturdy and architectural adding interest to an area even after the petals have fallen. The coneflowers, Echinaceae and Rudbeckia spp., are examples. It remains for the gardener to decide what is interesting and what is not in their individual situation. Ornamental grasses put on their best display in the fall and continue to make an impression throughout the winter.

If roses are part of your garden, hold off on pruning them until spring with the exception of canes that are risk for storm damage due to their height. Leave at least 3 to 4 feet of cane for the winter. Apply mulch to grafted roses in mid-November after the soils have cooled. Remember to water into the fall. Trees, shrubs, perennials and your lawn will go through the



winter in better condition if they are not in drought stress. This gardening season has thrown more than a few curve balls our way, but probably no more than most years. Each year is its own adventure and for me this is the best part of the gardening year. Reflect, refresh, renew – fall is the real New Year for your garden.

### *Other tips:*

- Amend soil with compost when planting to improve drainage and moisture retention. Visit your local independent retailer for a selection of quality bagged composts as well as bulk compost. Adequate soil amendment is the best step to success in gardening, no matter the time of year.
- Water new plantings thoroughly using a root stimulator. Check the soil every few days for moisture by digging down next to the root ball to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. If the soil is still moist, do not water. When the soil has dried, water thoroughly again. As a rule, a thorough watering every 5 to 7 days is sufficient to establish new plantings.
- Applying a 3 to 4 inch layer of organic material such as compost or pine bark mulch will help soils to retain moisture.
- Newly planted trees need to be staked for stability. The stakes may be removed after one complete growing season.
- Tree wrap should be put on the trunks of young trees in November. The tree wrap protects the thin bark from the effects of sunscald, which is common due to alternating warm and cold temperatures and the light intensity of low rays of sun. Tree wrap should be removed from the tree in April. Young trees should be wrapped yearly until they develop their mature bark.
- Cut back excessive top growth of perennials when planting. This will help the plant to establish a stronger root system without having to sustain an excess of foliage and flower.

Take advantage of the cooler temperatures of autumn by planning and planting for the year ahead. Visit [www.plantsomethingco.org/know-where-to-go](http://www.plantsomethingco.org/know-where-to-go) to find a local independent retailer in your area. Remember, **Fall is for Planting!**