

Advertising Supplement to the Boston Globe

# FALL HOME DESIGN



## Fall Landscaping: A Time to Prepare

By E.T. Robbins



Although summer is a fading memory and the reality of winter is setting in, it's never too early to take stock of your yard while dreaming of spring. With a little help from our local gardening and lawn experts, you might even enjoy the fall clean up.

### A Splash of Spring Color

Guy Doran, third generation owner of 110 year old Doran's Greenhouses in Lexington, says he's surprised that people don't appreciate the importance of proper fall preparation. "If people enjoy gardening and want a nice spring garden, you have to plant in the fall."

Doran says an easy way to accomplish this is by planting spring bulbs such as daffodils, crocuses, tulips, or hyacinths. "The nice thing about bulbs is if they are planted at a reasonable date - meaning September,

October, or very early November - they have plenty of time to root and to establish themselves which they have to do before the ground freezes. The bulb is an all-inclusive package for one year. Everything the bulb needs to grow and flower is in the bulb now."

### Food for Thought

Jim Stefanis, owner of Stow Gardens, says taking care of your soil - whether it's your lawn or garden soil - is the most important thing to remember this fall. "Soils are fairly acidic and with the acid rain that we have, they only get more acidic each year, so it's important to lime both your lawns and your gardens, almost on an annual basis."

Stefanis adds that if you're serious about gardening you should have your soil tested.

The UMass Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Lab in Amherst is one option. Its Web site, [www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest/](http://www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest/), lists proper soil collecting procedures, costs, and mailing directions.

Jeffrey Dodge, manager at Wildflowers Etc., in Wakefield, explains that a basic soil test measures the pH (acidity) level. From this information, you can determine how much lime or fertilizer to use. Dodge also recommends aerating your lawn by renting a lawn aerator machine.

"Lawn aeration helps the soil's structure. What it does is pokes holes in the ground and forces air into the soil particles. It's important for the roots to get air. Water will get down there more rapidly. After you aerate, you can fertilize with a fall fertilizer and the fertilizer will get down there faster."

Dodge suggests aerating every other year or even every two years, explaining that too much aeration can damage the soil. More importantly, Dodge insists that staying on a strict fertilizing program during the spring, summer, and fall is imperative. And when in doubt, consult the experts.

### Caring for Shrubs & Bushes

Audrey Nessralla of Nessralla's Greenhouses and Garden, in Avon, says rose bush preparation varies depending on the type of bush and the person doing the prep work.

"Every grower has a different way of doing it. They don't really tell you to prune the rose bushes back in the fall. Do it in early, early spring. But a lot of people cut them right to the ground and mulch them over. If you have luck doing that, do what you're doing. If you don't have luck, don't prune back in the fall."

She also reminds people to think about their evergreen trees. "Last year we had a very snowy year. This year we're predicted to have the same. I would tell everyone with evergreens - they need to be tied up. I lost five or six last year because they split right in half with the heavy snow."

### City Dwellers

Peter Vera of Earthbound, in Boston, says it's just as important to take care of your window boxes and container gardens (often found in the city or on balconies of condos and apartments) while tending front or backyard garden and vegetable plots.

"If you have plantings in your container gardens or window boxes, you have to water them on a regular basis up until the point the soil freezes. You'll have less dieback in the

spring as the soil is defrosting if the soil in the plant is well hydrated before it freezes."

Vera says if you keep tropicals, such as orange trees, outside, then you need to "acclimate" them by bringing the plants in at night.

"It's advisable to start bringing them in the first week in September and acclimating them. You'll have less dieback and other shocking things happening to the plant."

**"If people enjoy gardening and want a nice spring garden, you have to plant in the fall."**

If you haven't done this yet, however, don't panic. Cut down on the acclimation process or forget it all together. Vera says, "Better to get it in out of the cold than to have dieback because of the cold."

### Mulching Mania

Mark Cutler, of Mahoney's Garden Center in Cambridge (with six additional locations including Winchester, Tewksbury, and Wayland) says gardeners make two mistakes when mulching - they mulch too soon or they use the wrong type of mulch. Cutler recommends salt marsh hay.

"Regular straw and hay has a lot of seed in it. So what happens is you'll get a lot of other things (like grasses)

growing up in your garden in the springtime when the seeds from the straw and hay germinate in the soil when you remove it. Also, if you mulch too soon, this invites mice and other rodents to get in because of the warmth. They feed on the plants."

Cutler says wait until the freeze comes before putting down the salt marsh hay, usually between Thanksgiving and the beginning of December.

### Veggie Garden Know-How

Just because you've harvested the goods doesn't mean you should forget about your vegetable garden until next year. Nessralla recommends planting winter rye.

"You'll have to rototill it back in the spring, but it adds lots of nutrients into the soil."

### Winter Homework

Read, read, read! Cutler says, "It's all fantasy at that point. Become an armchair traveler; apply it to gardens, and just read. You can't stop learning about gardens."

