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Winter Garden Transitions

After the growing season ends, when all of the plants have spent their energy, it's time to transition to maintenance and cleaning up. Tasks to remove old debris and protect living plants are a priority right now. Clearing the lawn of leaves will be beneficial in the long term. However, they can be beneficial as nesting grounds for ecologically important insects and pollinators. It is best to either compost leaves from the lawn or move them aside, so the lawn can still breathe. However, leaves can provide a decent mulch for garden beds. Like with lawns, garden plants can become smothered if the leaves become too thick of a mat in late winter after precipitation.

As for removing other plant material, it is usually best to save pruning and perennial limb removal for late winter or early spring. The cover of a spent perennial can help keep the roots alive. It is also better to prune woody plant limbs at a point when they can quickly heal over. A good consideration right now for trees is tree wrap. Wrapping a trunk three feet up or so can prevent damage from rodents and deer. Wrapping with a light-colored plastic or other tree wrap can also prevent sunscald from damaging thinly barked trees in the winter. The wrap will need to be removed in the spring, to avoid damaging the tree.

Lastly, general winter chores can include assessing and throwing away old garden tools and potting materials; Sharpening and oiling pruners and shears; and triple washing pesticide sprayer tanks and nozzles. Winter is also a great time to plan next year's garden!

The growing season isn't completely over, however! Some plants can be brought indoors over winter. When bringing plants indoors, it's important to consider their new needs. Plants will need plenty of light, but less water than outdoors. New arrivals should be quarantined and inspected to prevent infecting already existing inhabitants. Throughout the winter, all indoor plants should be inspected for mealybugs and scale insects.

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