



# Winterize Your Garden

SEDGWICK GARDENS AT LONG HILL  
THE TRUSTEES OF RESERVATIONS



## *Perennials – Fall Cleanup*

Some perennials are attractive, even when spent—with interesting textures or seedheads. You may choose not to cut some perennials in the fall. The faded blooms of *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy,’ for example, are beautiful in the snow.

Most perennials, however, should be cut in the fall to a height of 3”-4”. Debris should be cleared from the beds to prevent disease. Most people wait until the first heavy frost. If perennials are still green by late October, go ahead and cut them. In the low light and lower temperatures, the plants have virtually stopped growing.

## *What Not to Cut*

These plants should not be cut in the fall. Wait until spring.

- Plants with gray leaves  
Perennials: *Lavandula* sp., *Dianthus* sp., *Chrysanthemum* sp. (perennial varieties), etc.  
Shrubs: *Buddleia* sp., *Caryopteris* sp., *Paeonia suffruticosa*, etc.
- Semi-evergreen perennials: *Epimedium* sp., *Polystichum acrostichoides*, *Asarum europaeum*, etc.
- Ornamental grasses
- Hellebores
- Roses

## *Winter Mulch*

Winter mulch adds a layer of protection to roots and crowns. It is applied in late fall to specific plants in addition to the mulch you may apply during the growing season. Winter mulch insulates the ground once it is frozen and helps keep it frozen until spring. Without it, repeated freezing and thawing may kill plants.

Winter mulch may consist of salt marsh hay, leaves, pine needles, evergreen boughs, etc. (Don’t use field hay or straw as it probably contains weed seeds.) Examples of plants that might benefit from winter mulch include: perennials in exposed locations, tree peonies, roses (see below), and marginally hardy plants.

Timing is key. Don't be tempted to apply winter mulch before the ground freezes. If applied too early, winter mulch becomes home for rodents such as mice and voles, which can be very destructive to plants.

### *Desiccation*

Before the ground freezes, be sure young and newly planted shrubs and trees are well watered to help prevent winter desiccation. Additional protection against drying winter winds may be provided in the form of vertical enclosures. These may consist of burlap strung on stakes or wire cages filled with leaves or hay.

Broadleaf evergreens such as rhododendrons and laurels may benefit from a spray of a commercial anti-desiccant such as Wilt-Pruf. Most practical for smaller shrubs, these products may require more than one application during the winter.

### *Pots & Statuary*

Most terracotta pots, high-glaze containers such as Vietnamese blue pots, and some cast cement items such as birdbaths are not frostproof. Freezing and thawing moisture will cause them to crack. Bring them inside before the first hard freeze. If you must store these non-frostproof items in an unheated area, make sure they are empty, dry, and upside down. Heavy cast stone statuary, stone benches, and urns that cannot be moved, should be raised off any surface that will freeze and thaw. Use strips of pressure treated wood. If you can, tilt the stone items to one side and then the other to insert the wood. Do not block drainage holes. To avoid snow filling open containers, make covers from exterior grade plywood. Cover the wood with heavy plastic sheeting; fasten with twine under the outer top edge of the pot.

### *Heeling in*

Potted perennials, small shrubs in containers, and hypertufa troughs should be "heeled in" for the winter. Dig a hole in a protected spot that is slightly wider than the container and the same depth. Sink the container into the hole to the depth of the soil in the container. Backfill with soil, but do not add soil to the container. Cover lightly with saltmarsh hay or evergreen boughs. In the Long Hill holding nursery, we heel in potted plants in a thick bed of wood chips from local trees.

### *Roses*

According to the Rhode Island Master Gardener training manual, "most roses require some degree of winter protection to keep them dormant and protected



during mid-winter freeze/thaw cycles.” The manual suggests three types of winter protection for roses:

- **Hilling up:** Mounding soil, aged manure, mulch, shredded oak leaves, compost, or seaweed at the base of rosebush to a height of 12"-15". This protects the base of the canes and the bud union. In the spring, pull away the mounds and use the material to enrich the garden.
- **Rose collars:** Make a small cage 12"-18" high of wire screen, tar paper, or plastic. Fill with shredded oak leaves, mulch, manure, or compost. Remove the collars in the spring and spread the filler.
- **Rose cones:** Available commercially, rose cones look like inverted Styrofoam ice cream cones. Trim the canes of the rose so they fit inside the cone and put a hole in each cone for ventilation. Weigh down the cones to avoid their blowing away.

### *Deer and Critter Protection*

If hungry enough, deer will browse almost any plant in winter—eating twigs, buds, bark, broadleaf evergreen leaves, and needles. Small animals such as mice and voles will chew bark, particularly at the soil line under the snow. Rabbits may browse low twigs and buds. Deterrents should be installed in November.

Common deer deterrents include:

- Netting
- Liquid repellents
- Fencing – flexible mesh or electric

Plastic deer netting (available at garden centers) can simply be draped over small shrubs and tied at the bottoms to avoid blowing away. Deer seem to dislike crunching the mesh.

There are a variety of liquid deer repellents available, some of which are organic. However, reliability varies and reapplication is usually necessary. Again, these repellents are most appropriate for small shrubs.

Flexible deer fencing usually consists of lightweight poly or wire mesh supported by stakes. Deer are powerful jumpers, so perimeter deer fencing must be tall, typically 8 feet or higher. Small enclosures to protect hedges and individual plants should be a minimum of 6 feet high. Staking the bottom edge of the mesh may also deter small animals such as rabbits. Flexible fencing is usually used as a winter deterrent and is dismantled in spring.

Electric fencing is a more expensive and more permanent solution. Due to its complexity, however, it should be probably installed commercially. The strands need to be spaced so deer can neither jump over nor squeeze through.

Common rodent deterrents include:

- \*Trunk cages
- \*Plastic collars
- \*Tree wrap

Deter rodents by encircling tree trunks and single stemmed shrubs with low cages made from rabbit wire (similar to chicken wire but a heavier gauge). Use electrician's ties to fasten the mesh. Cages should touch the trunks but not bind. There should be no space for critters to climb in from the top. Trunk cages are typically about 12" high, and the bottom edges should be buried slightly in the soil. Plastic collars that function in much the same way are available commercially. Collars and cages should be removed in the spring.

An employee at Long Hill reports success in deterring rodents beneath the snow by wrapping the trunks of a small tree and a young shrub with tree wrap. Available at garden centers, tree wrap looks like a large roll of crêpe paper. Wrap the trunk in a spiral fashion starting at waist level, or higher, and ending just below the soil surface. Remove the wrap in the spring. Using tree wrap in the winter also supposedly helps prevent sun scald of young trunks.

