

"From the Potting Shed"

Riverview Garden Club – Helpful Hints
October, 2026

This checklist will assist you in your fall garden cleanup. Try a two-phase cleanup by removing diseased and weedy material now, but leave healthy perennials, grasses, and a layer of leaves in place until spring. This way, your garden stays healthier while still supporting birds, pollinators, and soil life through winter. Also, remember to "Leave the Leaves" where you can. Leaf mulch is a great nutrient-rich, free mulch for your garden!

Things to do in the garden this month…

Wildlife-Friendly & Soil-Boosting Tips

- Chop leaves with a mulching mower instead of bagging them.
- Spread shredded leaves over garden beds as free mulch.
- Create a refuge with chicken wire and leaves to shelter beneficial insects.
- Use leaves as mulch between vegetable beds—rake in decomposed matter next spring.
- Add leaves to worm bins to boost microbial activity.
- Leave seed heads and grasses for birds and winter interest.

Fall Chores

- Clear vegetable beds—compost healthy plants, discard diseased ones.
- Water new trees, shrubs, and perennials deeply before the ground freezes.
- Mow grass one last time at normal height (about 3 inches).
- Cut back perennials like Hostas and daylilies that get soggy.
- Empty containers, compost soil, and scrub pots before storing.
- Clean and sharpen garden tools so they're ready for spring.

Seasonal Prep & Protection

- Mulch tender perennials and roses after the ground freezes.
- Divide and transplant perennials that have outgrown their spots.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs like daffodils, tulips, and alliums.
- Protect young trees by wrapping trunks to prevent winter sunscald and critter damage.
- Bring in frost-tender plants (tropicals, houseplants, succulents).
- Drain and store hoses, and shut off outdoor faucets to avoid freeze damage.
- Clean birdhouses and feeders to prepare for winter visitors.
- Top off compost piles with extra leaves for slow winter breakdown.
- Check mulch depth around shrubs and trees—maintain 2–3 inches, pulled back from trunks.
- Store lawn furniture and garden décor to prevent weather damage.

Pros of Fall Cleanup:

- Reduces pests and disease: Removing diseased foliage (like mildew-covered peony leaves or rust-spotted hollyhocks) prevents problems from carrying into spring.
- Keeps things neat: Clearing beds now makes way for early bulbs and lightens spring chores.
- Controls spreaders: Removing seed-heavy plants prevents them from overtaking pathways or gravel.

Cons of Over-Cleaning:

- Loss of habitat: Many pollinators, salamanders, turtles, and small mammals shelter in leaf litter and hollow stems.
- Less winter beauty: Ornamental grasses and seed heads bring movement and structure when the garden is bare.
- Nutrient loss: "Leaves form a natural mulch that helps suppress weeds and fertilizes the soil as it breaks down," NWF naturalist David Mizejewski. Bagging them up sends free fertilizer to the landfill.

Resource:

Linda Hagan, **"Fall Garden Cleanup: What to Cut Back, What to Leave, and Why"**, Garden Design Newsletter, October, 2026.

Happy Fall Gardening!