

## **Putting your garden to bed**

From Linda Cornell

Are we ready to clean up and put our gardens to bed? Now is the time to initiate the protection from the harsh winter months ahead. This will reward us next spring with the beauty only a well-tended garden can offer.

Prior to the first hard frost cut away blackened stems and foliage from both annuals and perennials. These may contain diseases and insect eggs that will carry over until next year. Remove all dead and dry stems from perennials but leave the curious, interesting seed pods that will give you some fun "structure" in your garden to admire. If you have evergreen perennials these leaves should also be cleaned up. Keep the green healthy leaves, though. The theory behind this cleaning is simple. Without it, the stems and leaves fall into the garden bed. Those spores or eggs which may be present could spend the winter content, flourishing under the debris only to reappear and attack your garden in the spring. This is simply proper garden sanitation.

When the temperatures finally dip down to constant freezing cut back perennials to three to six inches. Remove all annuals from the garden, composting them as well.

It is also time to clean up old mulch and refresh it. This new mulch should be applied AFTER the first deep frost preventing mice and other rodents from nesting in the new addition. As a rule the mulch depth is two to four inches, but on the lesser side if there are fallen seeds that you are expecting to come up next spring. After the ground freezes, mid December usually, you can add a loose covering on the entire garden (over plant crowns) of either salt marsh hay or evergreen boughs. This keeps the ground frozen so that the heave of freezing/thawing does not effect your plants.

Don't forget to collect seeds for next spring! And as a side note, if we do not get enough rain, continue to water your garden throughout the fall.

"Wiltpruf" may also be sprayed on those broadleaf evergreens and roses to limit the desiccation (drying out) that occurs with the winter winds.

The whole idea of a garden is to enjoy it in all seasons of the year. It will tell you when to clean up certain plants. The timing is theirs not ours. This cleaning up process is a slow one and can be appreciated each day you walk out with your shears or clippers to see what is ready and what still brings its

loveliness to your garden.

\*\* This article will also be posted on “What’s the Buzz” on the website,  
<http://www.gardenclubbuzzardsbay.org/blog>.