



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Four Steps for Fall Cleanup in the Garden (October 11, 2025)

By UCCE Master Gardeners of Tulare/Kings Counties

A week ago, it felt like fall would never arrive. But sure enough, the days have shortened, the temperature has cooled, and fall is finally here. So that means, it's time for a Fall Cleanup!

A little effort now results in less garden work in the winter and early spring. Plus, your garden will look more attractive to you AND be less attractive to insects, diseases, and weeds for several months. First, walk around your yard and assess how your garden has grown over the year. Take note of what worked well and what didn't, then develop a list of improvements to make. Fix them this fall, and by next spring, you will have forgotten those problem spots.



Here are our four steps to Fall Cleanup:

Step 1: Pull Out. Start your fall cleanup by pulling out tired annual flowers and summer vegetables. If the plants or areas were riddled with insects, diseased, or if there are a lot of weeds, then it is best to recycle this plant material in the green yard waste can. If you are an avid composter and monitor your piles to reach at least 140 degrees F (the temperature required to kill most weed seeds and pathogens), then you can compost this stuff yourself. After you've "pulled out" all the excess vegetation, lightly rake the areas under the base of plants prone to diseases or snails and slugs. The goal is to remove any debris that will provide a hiding place for disease pathogens and insects to overwinter.

Step 2: Cut back. When we have a long summer and late fall, many herbaceous perennials like salvias, chrysanthemums, and several herbs will still be in their prime. When temperatures drop, it's time to cut those perennials down to their basal leaves, which will direct energy to the roots for next season. You create a stronger, more compact plant when its energy doesn't go to seed making. It may delay spring bloom by a few weeks, but the plant and the bloom will be bigger!

Especially attractive or wildlife-friendly plants can be left standing to provide winter interest and food for birds and butterflies. Let plants like roses set hips, and *Echinacea* form seeds to feed the birds. Encouraging birds to stay in your garden means they will be there in the spring to help battle aphids, bugs, and worms.

For some plants, like hardy geranium or coreopsis, it might seem like an overwhelming task to remove all the small flowers. In that case, use shears to cut off the blooms. For flowers with a leafless stem, like daylilies, cut the stems down to the base of the plant and remove the entire stem.



Some plants don't need to be cut back now, such as *Sedum 'Autumn Joy'*, coral bells, hellebores, and asters. Also, don't cut back ornamental grasses like pink muhly, purple fountain grass, or fescues now. They look beautiful in the winter and will provide some structure and color contrast. Cut them back in the early spring when new growth begins. Remember, don't prune azaleas, camellias, forsythia, lilacs, or other spring-flowering shrubs and trees because they have already formed their flowers for next year.

Step 3: Weed. Weed, weed, weed, and watch for snails and slugs. When it rains, you can bet that weeds will germinate and emerge. If you have areas that are particularly prone to weeds, now is the time to apply a preemergent herbicide to control winter weeds (don't apply preemergent in an area where you'll want to plant bedding plants or sow seeds, as the preemergent will prevent their growth). Otherwise, a weekly walk around the yard with a weeding tool and pail will usually do the trick. Applying snail baits in the fall will really reduce the number of snails and slugs in the spring. Choose baits wisely, as some are very poisonous to children and pets, while others are harmless to them.

Step 4: Mulch. The last step to fall Cleanup is to add organic mulch to exposed soil. Over time, the mulch will decompose, add more nutrients to the soil, and help improve the soil texture. It will also protect your perennials from frost upheaval in those areas that are subject to ground freezing.

Fall is the perfect time for a Garden Cleanup. Think about it. Do you want to go outside in winter, when it's really cold and foggy?

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

Visit our website for past articles, sign up for our e-newsletter, or email us with your questions:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

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The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Luis Nursery, 2nd Saturday, 10 am – 2 pm, 139 S. Mariposa Ave., Visalia

Hofman's Nursery, 3rd Saturday, 10 am – 1 pm, 12491 W Lacey Blvd., Hanford