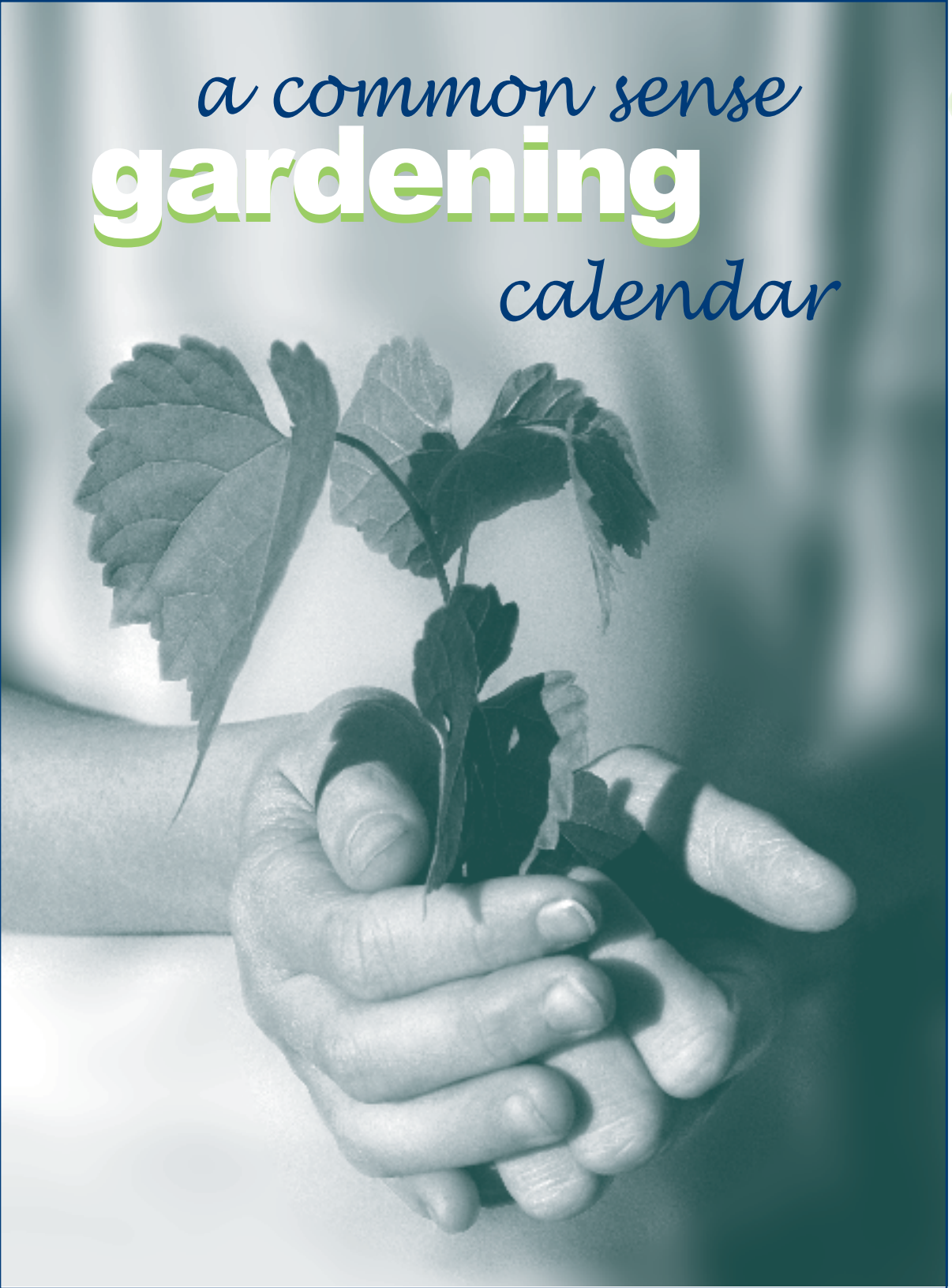
a common sense gardening calendar



your guide to planning a healthy garden

why common sense gardening?

Studies show that pesticides are getting into streams, rivers, oceans, groundwater, and our bodies. A study in western Washington by the U.S. Geological Survey found pesticides in 95% of rivers and streams sampled and over 50% of sampled wells. Research indicates links between pesticide exposure and the increased incidence of cancers, reproductive and neurological disorders, asthma, and other conditions. Children and pets are especially vulnerable because of their size, close contact to lawn and soil, and (in the case of children) hand to mouth behavior.

Common Sense Gardening encourages gardeners to make gardening choices with health and the environment in mind. It is a system of growing healthy plants by creating healthy soil, watering deeply and infrequently, placing plants in their optimum environments, and understanding pest cycles to effectively deal with an infestation when necessary. When controls are needed, the least-toxic method is used. After all, if you garden for healthy recreation, to relax outdoors, or to provide your family with healthy food and beauty to enjoy, using least-toxic methods is a common sense choice!

about the calendar

In the Northwest, the scheduling of yard and garden activities is less dependent on the calendar month than temperature, moisture, and the appearance of our sometimes elusive friend, the sun. The Common Sense Gardening Calendar is organized seasonally rather than month-to-month. This calendar draws upon the collective experience of local gardeners, local organizations dedicated to assisting gardeners, and the expertise of people who have taken time to write about their years of experience! The calendar was prepared by Thurston County and its cities with printing supported in part by the Washington State Department of Ecology.

winter

a common sense guide

planting

There is still time to plant spring bulbs in December. Plant bulbs three times deeper than the greatest diameter of the bulb. For example, a crocus bulb with an average one inch diameter should be planted three inches deep.

Plant and transplant shrubs and trees during the dormant winter months. Prepare the hole twice as wide as the entire root system of the shrub or tree being transplanted. A little research (or ask the nursery staff person) will instruct you where to plant your particular species for its optimum growth. Set the plant at the same level it was previously growing.

Mix compost into the top six inches of soil returned to the hole.

Mulch around the plant, but not up against the trunk or stem. Water deeply. Newly planted trees and shrubs should be watered weekly during dry weather.

January and February are great months to select and plant roses. Select varieties that are pest and disease resistant and plant them in areas where they will get enough sun. Refer to the *Common Sense Gardening Guide to Roses** for more tips on growing roses in the Pacific Northwest.

Take cuttings of evergreens you want to propagate such as heathers, rhododendrons, and azaleas. Take the cutting from new tip growth. Keep cuttings in soil or water in a place with bright light and average temperature of 70° F. Rooted cuttings can be planted outside in the early spring.

maintenance

A soil test helps pinpoint your fertilizer needs and helps diagnose problems. For a list of professional testers, visit **www.co.thurston.wa.us/health** or call Environmental Health at 360-867-2674.

Mid to late February is the time to fertilize trees, shrubs, and evergreens with a slow-release natural fertilizer that plants can access all year long.

Check plants under tall evergreens or house eaves to see if they have enough water. Plants in other parts of the garden have received enough water during the fall and winter rains but these hidden plants may need additional watering to protect them from the cold winter.

Check stored flower bulbs, vegetables, and fruits for fungus or pest damage. Compost immediately if any rot or mold is found. For more information on vegetable storage, see WSU Cooperative Extension Publication EB1326. Contact WSU Extension at 360-867-2157 or online at **https://extension.wsu.edu/thurston/.**

Cover compost piles with plastic to prevent a soggy mess and potential leaching of nutrients. Cover your piles leaving space at the bottom for venting.

Stay off of soggy or frozen grass to minimize damage. Moss in the lawn means too much shade, low soil fertility, and/or poor drainage. Lime can help rid your lawn of moss but only if you also address the underlying fertility, light, or drainage issues. For more lawn care tips, refer to the *Common Sense Gardening Guide to Natural Lawn Care**.

Pull weeds before they go to seed.

Rotting plant parts in the garden should be removed and composted to prevent disease in next year's beds.

Use the next 3 months to plan next year's garden. Take note of what worked well this year and what didn't. To learn more about designing a healthy landscape based on site conditions, read the *Common Sense Gardening Guide, Plan Before You Plant.**

Winterize garden tools before storing them. Drain garden hoses. Clean, sharpen, and oil shovels, hoes, rakes, pruners, loppers, and shears. Vegetable oils work well for oiling blades and handles. Drain the gasoline out of lawn mowers and rototillers and run the engine to remove any gas that could damage the carburetor. Take old gasoline to HazoHouse for safe disposal. Call 360-867-2912 for more information on hazardous waste disposal.

Take advantage of the slowed garden pace by building compost and/or worm bins. Resources are available on our website or at local nurseries.

pest/disease control

Early winter is a good time to apply dormant sprays to control overwintering insect and disease problems. For safer pest, disease and weed control products, go to **www.growsmartgrowsafe.org.**

Corticum red thread is a fungal disease affecting grass. It develops during periods of high moisture and cool temperatures. Symptoms are water-soaked, dark, irregular areas from two to 24 inches in diameter. These become blanched or tan, and later, light pink to red fungus strands grow from grass blades. Fertilize with a high nitrogen, slow-release fertilizer in the spring and fall and cut lawn at two inches and "let it lie" (mulch mowing) the rest of the year to provide a constant source of nitrogen.

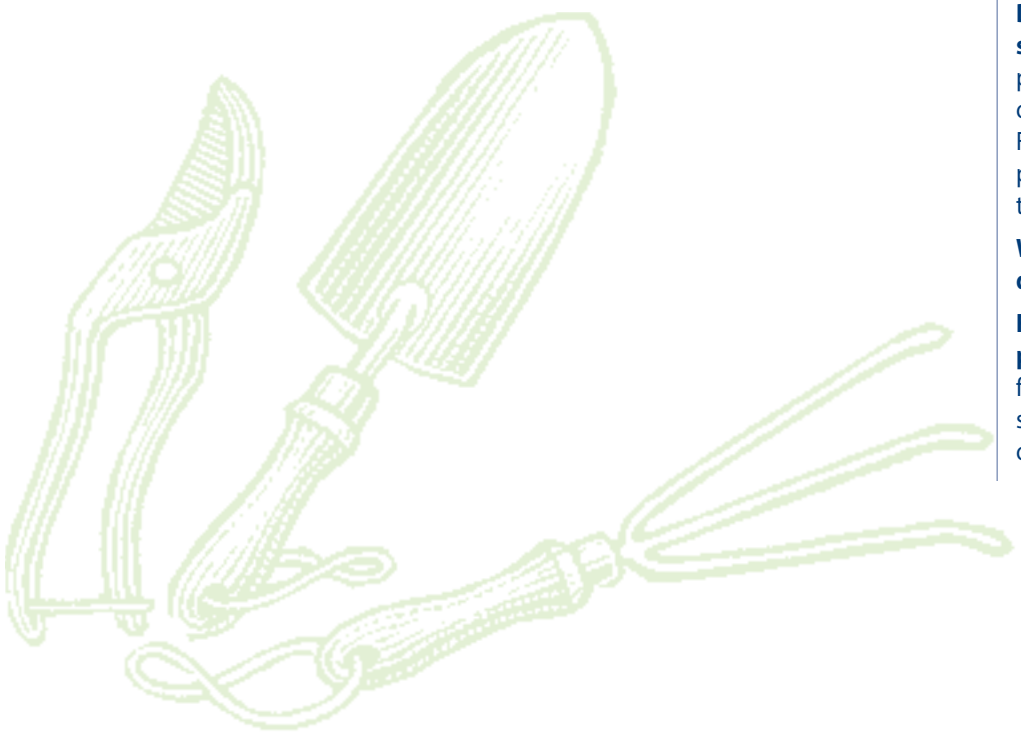
Destroy slugs and their pearly egg clusters as you clean up garden beds.

pruning

December is a good month to prune stone fruits such as cherries, plums, and peaches. Wait to prune apples, pears, and other trees and shrubs until January or February. Pruning is best done during periods of dry weather when temperatures are above freezing.

Winter is the time to prune most deciduous trees and shrubs.

Fruit, flowering, and shade trees can be pruned, but do not prune spring-flowering plants to avoid removing their spring buds and to reduce the chance of brown rot and blight.



to do:
december

to do:
january

to do:
february

spring

a common sense guide

As a rule, don't prune, plant or uncover plants during freezing temperatures. Most areas of Thurston County are frost-free by late April.

planting

Start warm weather variety flowers and vegetables indoors in a sunny window, under fluorescent lights, or in a greenhouse in pots, trays, or egg cartons. By starting seeds in March you'll get a 30-60 day head start on the season.

The soil is dry enough to work when you can squeeze a handful of dirt and it doesn't ooze water. Another way to tell if soil is ready to be worked is to form a ball of soil, throw it in the air and let it fall into your hand. If it crumbles, it is ready; if it stays in a ball, it is still too wet. Cultivating soil that is too wet (or too dry) can damage soil structure.

Compost, well-rotted manure, and other organic matter can be incorporated into the soil as you prepare planting beds. Turn in cover crops, ideally, before they go to seed.

Plant perennial vegetables such as asparagus, rhubarb, horseradish, and artichokes in March.

Use a soil or compost thermometer to determine when to begin spring planting. Vegetables labeled as "half-hardy" can be sown as night temperatures warm to 40-50° F. "Half-hardy" vegetables include carrots, broccoli, parsnips, parsley, radishes, beets, peas, and potatoes.

After the last frost, it's time to sow summer blooming, half-hardy flowers that will provide color all summer. Varieties ready to be planted include sunflowers, zinnias, canna lilies, blazing star, blueweed, aster, marigolds, cosmos, and bishop's flower. Perennials such as aubrietia, candytuft, basket of gold, primroses, and coral bells can be planted as soon as the danger of frost has passed.

Hardy vegetables such as spinach, lettuce, green mixes, cabbage, chard, and onions, can be planted as frosts decrease in intensity and length – usually by April.

Perennial herbs such as chives, lovage, mint, rosemary, and sage can be planted when soil warms to 50° F.

Sow seeds for salad mixes every two weeks from April through September.

Plant gladiolas, geraniums, begonias, and dahlias.

Divide hostas, daylilies, mums, phlox, fall asters, baby's breath, and peonies to spread their beauty throughout the yard and garden.

There is still time to plant small trees, shrubs, and perennials but it is getting too late to transplant large bare-root trees or shrubs.

Fuchsias and geraniums should be ready to go back outside when nighttime temperatures reach 50° F.

Tender annuals and corn can be sown in May as temperatures and light increase towards summer.

maintenance

After beds are prepared, lay down soaker hoses for the most efficient watering.

Fertilize roses with slow-release fertilizer.

Fertilize rhododendrons and azaleas with compost or slow-release fertilizer. Make sure the fertilizer does not contain lime, as they prefer more acidic soil.

When it gets dry enough to mow the lawn, set mower height at 2" and leave the grass clippings on the lawn. This is called mulch mowing or "cutting it high and letting it lie," and provides your lawn with a natural, slow-release source of nitrogen all year.

De-thatch lawn if old roots and stems at ground level exceed 1/2" inch. Aerate lawn and dig out perennial weeds, then over-seed with a mixture of grasses adapted to our climate.

Use a 3:0:2 ratio of natural, slow-release fertilizer at a rate of one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. during the last two weeks of May and again in the fall. Other good proportions to look for are 10:0:6, 5:0:4, or similar ratios. This, in addition to mulch mowing, will provide your lawn with all of the nitrogen it needs for green, lush growth. If you are filling in a new lawn or simply desire a more "perfect lawn," you can apply a slow-release fertilizer in November, for a total of three applications a year, in addition to regular mulch mowing. Read and follow directions on the fertilizer bag. For more information, refer to **www.growsmartgrowsafe.org/NaturalYardCare/SoilAmendments**

Try to pull weeds before they set seed. Your hard work will result in fewer weed seeds, meaning fewer weeds.

Turn the compost pile.

Mulch vegetable, flower, and shrub beds to conserve moisture and prevent weed seeds from germinating. Typical mulching materials include hay, wood chips, shredded bark, sawdust, cardboard, pine needles, and old cedar shavings. Place mulch between and around plants from two to four inches deep for best results. See our website or call Environmental Health for more information on mulching.

pest/disease control

Continue to seek and destroy slugs. April is the month to deal with any slug problems before they get out of hand. Mild winters and wet springs provide perfect conditions for slugs to thrive. Slugs prefer moist, cool groundcover to hide in, so plan your garden away from evergreen groundcovers or install a barrier between the groundcover and the garden. Slug hunting can be done either in the early morning or at night. Use a flashlight and follow any slime trails, looking among plant foliage and into the top two inches of the soil. Regular soil cultivation damages slug eggs and disturbs the juveniles. For more slug strategies, call Environmental Health or see **www.growsmartgrowsafe.org/IPM**.

Be kind to garter snakes – they eat slugs!

If you have had cranefly damage in the past, monitor for crane fly larvae. If numbers are above 40 larvae per square foot you may need to aerate and fertilize with a slow-release fertilizer. For more cranefly strategies, call Environmental Health or refer to **www.growsmartgrowsafe.org/IPM.**

Control cabbage worms in cabbage and cauliflower by hand removing or with barrier screens. Bt (Baccilus thurengensis) is an effective least-toxic control available in local nurseries.

Control aphids by using a hard stream of water, removing by hand, encouraging beneficial insects, or washing leaves with soapy water. For more information, see *Aphids, a Common Sense Guide.**

Use floating row covers or screens to prevent root maggots in cabbage, onions, and carrot families.

For safer pest, disease and weed control products, go to: **www.growsmartgrowsafe.org**

pruning

If you have not yet pruned your fruit, flowering, and shade trees, do so before the spring planting season begins, but not on a day when trees are frost-covered. Deciduous, early spring flowering shrubs should be pruned after they have finished flowering. Basic pruning improves the shape of the plant, opens it up for good air circulation, and allows for better sun exposure.

Prune evergreens such as juniper, cypress, and other conifers.

All types of roses can be pruned in March. Severe spring pruning results in long -stemmed flowers and attractive bushes in the summer.

Trim heather when bloom period is completed.

to do:
march

to do:
april

to do:
may

summer

a common sense guide

planting

June is your last chance to plant flowers from seed for late summer bloom. Keep seed beds moist until germination.

Plant any warm weather crops that have not yet been planted such as corn, peppers, squash, eggplant, tomatoes, cucumbers, and any remaining greens.

By late June, plant root crops such as beets, rutabagas, and turnips for fall and winter harvest.

By early August, sow over-wintering root crops and brassicas.

Shade cloth can reduce water evaporation and lower temperatures enough to create steady seed germination in the heat of summer. Use shade cloth for fall and winter vegetables such as lettuce and spinach that need cooler soil temperatures.

maintenance

Test sprinklers to see how well they are watering the entire garden. Set out empty containers such as cat food or tuna cans around areas being watered, including edges, corners, and slopes. Water for 15 minutes. Measure the water in the cans and multiply by four to see how much water each section gets in one hour. Make sure sprinklers are not watering driveways or walkways. Lawns need about one inch of water weekly either from irrigation or rain – not both. Water in the morning to prevent evaporation.

Pull or dig out weeds before they go to seed to prevent weeding in the future!

Divide spring-flowering perennials for transplanting.

Drip irrigation can reduce water lost to evaporation. If watering by hand, use an attachment that allows a sprinkling of water to reach seed beds.

Plant summer greens in soil rich in organic matter, water as needed, and pick them often to keep summer greens from going to seed early.

Turn the compost pile.

pest/disease control

98% of insects on the planet are beneficial. They pollinate crops, aerate the soil, and prey upon the other two percent that are pests! Beneficial insects are a Common Sense Gardener's best control for pests in the garden. Beneficial insects such as lady bugs, lace wings, and ground beetles occur naturally where there are insects that their larvae feed on, such as aphids and root maggots.

Plant flowers in the sunflower, carrot, cabbage, and buckwheat families to invite beneficial insects into your garden. Supplemental populations of beneficial insects are available in nurseries or by mail order. For more information on where to purchase beneficial insects, call Environmental Health or visit our website.

Avoid late tomato blight by keeping water off of tomato plant leaves, rotating tomato crops every year, and pruning plants to three or four branches. Water in the morning before 10 a.m. to reduce evaporation. Trellising plants enhances air circulation and prevents the fungus-loving conditions that blight thrives on. Greenhouse structures and cloches are effective ways to prevent late blight.

Look for other low-toxic tips and products at **www.growsmartgrowsafe.org.**

In August, powdery mildew can be a problem for the squash family, grapes, roses, and ornamentals. The spores of this fungus take over plant tissue that is dry due to drought, stress, or other damage. The first line of defense is to grow one of the many resistant varieties that are available. Consider amending the soil with calcium, potassium, and trace minerals in areas where diseases regularly occur. Often, with mildews, the soil is too dry, causing the plant to wilt and become susceptible. Organic sprays such as a garlic and soap spray or baking soda have been found to be effective preventatives.

Control aphids, whiteflies, thrips, and spider mites on plants by blasting them with a stream of water. Repeat as necessary.

Monitor rhododendrons for root weevil adults. Fresh evidence of feeding looks like notching on the leaves, trunk, and branches. Sticky traps around the trunks should control root weevils, or apply beneficial nematodes to control the larval stage. For more information, refer to our *Common Sense Gardening Guide, Root Weevils*.*

For safer pest, disease and weed control products go to:

www.growsmartgrowsafe.org

pruning

Prune flowers after their blossoms are spent, allowing the other buds to bloom. This practice is called deadheading.

pesticide disposal tips

Home gardeners may safely dispose of unwanted pesticides at HazoHouse, at the Thurston County Waste and Recovery Center, 2420 Hogum Bay Road NE, Lacey. Open daily, from 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. For more information, call 360-867-2912. Landscaping professionals, property managers and other businesses can call 360-867-2664 for information on business disposal of hazardous waste.

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to do: june

to do: july

to do: august

fall *a common sense guide*

planting

Plant greens under a cloche or in the greenhouse in early September for fall and winter harvest. Good choices include cilantro, mustard, arugula, winter spinach, endive, and winter lettuces.

Sow over-wintering greens outside by mid-September to allow them the size and strength to survive winter conditions. The following can be planted in a protected area of the garden for harvest in early spring: arugula, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, snow peas, beets, spinach, barley, rye, wheat, winter lettuces.

Plant onions and fava beans in October for a late spring harvest.

Plant garlic from October to early November to allow roots to grow before winter storms start. Garlic will be ready to harvest in early summer.

Plant flower bulbs this fall for early spring color. Tulips, daffodils, anemones, trilliums, crocus species, and ornamental onions can be planted before December.

Plant over-wintering cover crops by mid-October to provide nutrients and organic matter for next year's garden. Leguminous cover crops such as vetch and clover provide nitrogen that can be used by next season's crops. Common cover crops include: common vetch, crimson clover, winter wheat, barley, rye, and spelt.

Transplant evergreen and deciduous trees during fall and winter dormant months to reduce shock and damage.

Consider filling areas in with groundcovers (other than ivy) and shrubs. Look for discounted perennials at nurseries.

Transplant peonies, irises, rhodies, and azaleas.

maintenance

Mulch all beds that are not cover-cropped or planted in winter vegetables. You can use leaves from your yard to protect the soil. Leaves can protect winter root crops from hard frosts and make them easier to harvest. Three to five inches of mulch will protect your soil from rainfall that can leach nutrients away and from hard winter frosts that could damage root systems. Keep mulch away from the trunks of trees and shrubs.

Legumes need steady supplies of phosphorous, calcium, and sulfur. Test your soil this fall (if you haven't already) so you can make any adjustments before planting a leguminous cover crop such as field peas or clover. Make sure the soil test you use tests for calcium, manganese, sulfur, and other nutrients as well as nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium.

Continue pulling weeds in areas of the garden not mulched or planted.

Turn compost.

Turn off irrigation systems and drain garden hoses before storing.

De-thatch, aerate, and overseed lawn if you did not do it during the spring.

Clean up and compost decaying fruit from under trees. If fungus is an issue, dispose of decayed fruit in trash.

Fertilize the lawn. Use compost or a natural slow-release fertilizer with a ratio of 3:0:2 at a rate of on pound of available nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. For more natural lawn care and fertilizing tips, visit our website, call Environmental Health, or refer to *Natural Yard Care**.

Bring tender and semi-tender plants inside.

pest/disease control

Parasitic nematodes can be effective on root weevil infestations of rhododendrons and azaleas. Apply during the warmer months of fall for best results. For safer pest, disease and weed control products go to:

growsmartgrowsafeorg.

pruning

Prune roses to about 3 feet to prevent winter wind damage.

For sources and suggested reading contact:
Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department
Environmental Health Division
412 Lilly Road NE, Olympia, WA 98506
www.co.thurston.wa.us/health

*Common Sense Gardening Guides are available online at **www.thurston.wa.us/health** at local nurseries or in alternative format, by calling: 360-867-2674 or (TTY/TDD) 360-867-2603/1-800-658-6348

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