



Putting the Garden to Bed

by Marilyn Loser

2012 November 21

The days are unseasonably warm, but the garden has mostly gone to bed for the winter. I need to give it a little help. The watering system was shut off two weeks ago and the pipes blown out.

Midday Saturday was still and warm. I had a few spring-blooming bulbs to plant and poked around the garden to dig some holes. The ground was already frozen two inches down in well-watered portions of the garden that have rich soil. I had to plant the bulbs in sandier, more arid parts of the garden. If we get some winter moisture, I think they'll do well – I'll let you know!

The frozen areas of the garden did get enough water to see them through for the next few months. I hope the freeze happened slowly allowing plants to remove most of the water from their cells and thus avoid bursting.

So what about late fall, early winter watering? In Alamosa, I never used to water in the winter. I remember a two-foot snow storm Halloween weekend in 1983 when I first moved here – there was snow on the ground until April.

Before doing any winter watering, especially of trees, I'll take my trusty trowel and see how far down the soil is frozen. If the soil is loose in root zones, especially of trees, I'll probably water a bit in the middle of warm days when the roots have a chance to make use of the water before the evening freeze.

Next on my list is young tree-trunk protection – both from the sun and deer. I will surround the two new, small apple trees I planted this summer with wire cages, much like Alamosa City does to protect new park trees from deer. I'll also wrap the young, tender trunks in tree wrap to protect them from our intense winter sun. After a couple of years the bark should be tough enough to withstand most sun scald without tree wrap.

Tree wrap is about two-inches wide and reminds me of heavy crepe paper. I always remove it in the spring. Material collected between the trunk and wrap from wind storms can attract pests, especially if we've had some rain and the material is moist.

Some of the new trees the City of Alamosa purchased in the last few years came with cardboard tubes loosely wrapped around the trunk. I'm thinking of trying this in the future since it won't slip like the tree wrap does sometimes.

I still have a lot of flower stalks left from late blooming flowers. I'll collect seeds from Gloriosa daisies and asters and save them in a cool, dark place. Contact me at Marilyn@AlamosaFlowers.net if you'd like

some seeds! Then I'll chop the stalks to four-six inches tall and let the tops fall into the flower bed. This helps mulch the flower bed, protecting it from wind and sun. Yes, it does mean I have to come back in the spring and remove the mulch and perhaps trim the stalks a bit more. It also means, most of my perennials return to bloom the next summer.

I don't trim Autumn Joy sedum and hops plants as I love the way they look in the winter. As Jan Oen might say, "They provide some winter interest."

If you garden, you have garden waste. I pile up excess leaves and plant stalks in a wire bin and then shred them in the spring – they're a great source of mulch. Weedy plants and excess branches I take to the Alamosa recycling center. I'm very grateful for the new recycling center as I can just drag heavy branches to the ground-level branch area and not hoist them over the high sides recycling trailers as I had to do in the past. And I haven't missed the occasional dumped tire or old toilet in the pile! The recycling center is a bit further from my home than previous recycling areas, but it is very well kept and there's always room for my stuff. Thank you Alamosa City!

Lastly, I put away my bird bath basins. I used to leave them out and one year enough snow fell, melted and refroze that the basin cracked while we were gone.

I stand in my sleeping garden and happily think of times past and of next spring.

"The wise gardener anticipates June in January." Anon