**So long sweet summer! Prepping lawns and gardens for the winter**

As you begin to prepare your lawn and gardens for the winter, here are a few tips to help them emerge healthy in the spring.

**Vegetable and annuals**: Clear away old, dead plants before the snow begins to fall so that they don’t harbor pests or fungi over the winter. Pull weeds in your garden beds so that their roots don’t steal nutrients from the soil. If you have finished compost from the summer, work some of it into your garden beds now as well. Find a good recipe for fried-green tomatoes and start perfecting your pumpkin pie.

**Perennials:** Wait to cut down old stems and clumps of perennials until late winter or early spring. One-third of native bee species nest in hollow plant stems or wood. Seed heads from dried flowers and grasses also provide food for birds during the winter. After you cut down stems in the spring, leave them in loose piles for as long as possible to allow young bees time to hatch.

Leave the leaves in your woodlands and gardens as well to protect plants and provide insects and small animals with places to burrow beneath the snow. You can also gather up leaves from the lawn and pile them around plants like strawberries and roses to protect them from the cold. Fall is also the time to divide and plant bulbs.

**Trees and shrubs:** Avoid the temptation to prune trees and shrubs in the fall. Instead, wait to prune until the dead of winter when the sap is no longer flowing and there is less chance of spreading diseases.

**Lawns:** Keep watering your lawn until the ground freezes, but only if there is not enough rain. If you have bare patches in your lawn, you can spread seed now to begin growing in the spring. Put down seed before the ground freezes but after the weather turns cold - usually between late-October and mid-November. Loosen the soil with a rake, spread the grass seed, water the area thoroughly, and leave it until next spring. You should see germinated grass seedlings by late April or early May. According to MN Extension, fall is also the best time of year to apply herbicides to control broadleaf weeds.

**Rain barrels and irrigation systems:** Turn off and clear out your irrigation system when the temperature starts to drop to avoid cracking pipes and sprinkler heads. First, shut off the water supply to your irrigation system. Next, shut off the automatic controller (alternately, you can put it into “rain-mode” to avoiding having to reprogram it in the spring). Drain your pipes or contact an irrigation specialist to help you drain out the system. If you have rain barrels, empty them out and store them away for the winter.

**Leaves:** Instead of raking leaves, mow your lawn a few times to mulch up the leaves and return nutrients to the soil. Leave the leaves in garden areas as well to provide habitat and protect perennial plants during the winter. However, DO rake leaves out of the street in front of your home to keep them from clogging storm drains and sending nutrients into local lakes, rivers and wetlands when they decompose.

**Buckthorn:** While other trees and shrubs change color in the fall, invasive buckthorn will remain stubbornly green into late November. This makes fall a good time to seek and destroy buckthorn in your yard. Here are a few strategies for doing so: 1) Pull buckthorn out completely by the roots using a weed wrench; 2) Cut buckthorn down and treat the stumps with Ortho Brush-B-Gon, Garlon 3A or 4, or glyphosate to prevent re-sprouting; 3) Mix the same herbicides with an oil diluent (Bark Oil Blue, kerosene or diesel oil) and apply the mixture directly to the bottom 12-18 inches of small buckthorn plants to kill them gradually; or 4) Cut buckthorn as low to the ground as possible and then cover the stumps with a metal can, black plastic tied on tightly, or Buckthorn Baggie to prevent them from re-sprouting.