

Gardening Calendar

Summer is the high activity season in the garden, but if you plan ahead, you will have plenty of time during the summer to admire your garden rather than toiling in it. A fundamental care-free strategy is to do as much maintenance as you can during the "off seasons" of early spring and fall. Where winters are mild (Zones 7 to 9), winter is actually the first active gardening and maintenance season of the year. The following calendar is organized by season and by type of plant to help your care-free plants perform at their peak, year-round.

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	LATE WINTER	SPRING	EARLY SUMMER
ANNUALS	Plant cold-tolerant flowering annuals including lark- spur and poppies in all Zones. Remove mulch from overwintered pansies in cold areas.	Set out bedding plants of cold-tolerant flowering annuals including calendula, dusty miller, forget-me-not, lobelia, snapdragon, and stocks in early spring. Plant containers with spring-flowering plant combinations. After the soil warms, sow seeds in the garden for marigolds, nasturtiums, and zinnias. Set out warm-season annuals like begonias and annual geraniums after the last frost has passed.	Deadhead annuals regularly to prolong their flowering time, and pinch back coleus and plectranthus to increase the number of branches. Begin fertilizing annuals being grown in containers on a biweekly basis. Plant heat-tolerant annuals including fan flower, lantana, sweet potato vine, and thionia.
PERENNIALS	Look for the emergence of early bloomers like hellebores. Where the soil is not frozen, set out dormant perennials that have thick, heavy roots, such as goats-beard, gypsophila, and peony. As winter winds down, gradually rake back mulch used to cover dormant perennials, and topdress the root zones with a 1 in (2 cm) blanket of compost. Prune back ornamental grasses to just above the crowns, or growing points.	Set out potted and bare-root perennials as early as possible, just as they are emerging from dormancy. Dig and divide crowded asters, bee balm, lamb's ears, and other perennials that have become crowded. When new growth shows on established plants, fertilize them with an organic or controlled release fertilizer. Stake or support tall and bushy perennials while they are still small so that they hide the supports as they grow.	Trim spent flowers from early bloomers, such as candytuft and woodland phlox. Set out late bloomers such as asters, goldenrod, and sneezeweed. Lightly fertilize ferns and other woodland perennials. Weed and mulch established perennials, and provide stakes or other supports for tall and floppy plants.
VINES	Repair trellises if needed. Prune grapes. Plant sweet peas and other cool-season annuals.	Prune winter damage from large perennial vines like climbing roses and clematis, and erect or repair trellises. Fertilize established vines. Plant seeds of annual vines in the garden, such as hyacinth bean, morning glory, and scarlet runner bean.	Guide new stems of clematis, honeysuckle, and climbing rose toward their support, and tie them loosely if needed. Prune wisteria to control its size. Cut or deadhead sweet pea flowers to encourage new buds.
BULBS	Look for green growing tips of spring-flowering crocus, cyclamen, daffodils, hyacinths, snowdrops, squill, and tulips.	After the flowers wither, fertilize spring-flowering bulbs with commercial bulb fertilizer or bone meal according to label. Leave the foliage intact until it begins to yellow. Fertilize crocosmia and lilies with an all-purpose fertilizer, as soon as new growth appears. After the last frost passes, plant caladiums, callas, canas, and gladiolus.	Mark the locations of spring-flowering bulbs that you want to dig and divide in the fall. Set out more gladiolus. Fertilize caladiums, especially those growing in containers.
SHRUBS	Check stems for signs of small, oval immobile scale insects on branches and spray with dormant oil if needed. Prune back bluebeard and buddleia severely.	Prune away branches that appear dead or diseased. Plant all types of evergreen and deciduous shrubs. After the flowers fade, thin old branches from forsythia, lilac, and other spring-blooming shrubs. Fertilize young shrubs with an organic or controlled-release, all-purpose fertilizer. Renew mulches.	When pruning shrubs that have already bloomed, retain berry-bearing branches as much as possible. Continue setting out container-grown plants except in very hot summer areas. Provide water as needed to young shrubs planted in the spring.
TREES	Now's the time to plant hardy evergreens, such as false cypress and pines.	Set out new trees just as they are emerging from dormancy. Fertilize young trees with an organic or controlled release, balanced fertilizer applied according to package directions. Prune dead branches from established trees.	Hand weed around the bases of trees, and prune off any small suckers that emerge from the lower trunk.
LAWNS AND GROUNDCOVERS	In cold climates, rake up plant debris as soon as the snow melts. Cut back old leaves from liriope, and shear back ivy, pachysandra, and other groundcovers that need rejuvenation.	Fertilize cool-season lawns and apply a crabgrass preventer if desired. Set out new groundcover plants.	Fertilize warm-season lawns, and plant seed or sod in areas that need repair. Mow all types of grass often, removing only one-third of the grass blades' length as you mow. Fertilize established groundcovers with an organic or timed-release fertilizer.

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	LATE SUMMER	FALL	EARLY WINTER
ANNUALS	Pull up spring-planted annuals like pansies that are bloomed out. Give other annuals a deep drench with a soluble fertilizer. Shear back petunia and sweet alyssum to rejuvenate the plants. Set out flowering cabbage and kale, pansies, and chrysanthemums.	Expect many summer-weary annuals to make a strong comeback after nights become longer and cooler. Continue planting hardy pansies and ornamental cabbage and kale. In Zones 7 to 9, plant larkspur and poppies outdoors from seed, and set out bedding plants of dusty miller, annual dianthus, forget-me-not, and snapdragon.	In Zones 4 to 6, lightly mulch over overwintering pansies with a fluffy mulch of straw or evergreens,
PERENNIALS	Cut old flowering stems from all perennials that have already bloomed. Dig and divide bearded iris. Plant offsets from bugleweed and hens and chicks. Stake tall asters.	In Zones 6 to 9, you can save time in spring by dividing many perennials in fall, such as bee balm, bugleweed, daylilies, dianthus, obedient plants, and yarrow. In other areas, trim off dead foliage and renew mulches around plants as cold weather descends.	After the ground freezes from Zones 2 to 5, mulch over dormant perennials with a thick fluffy organic mulch like straw to keep the soil from thawing and refreezing. Where winters are milder, check plants often to see if any have been heaved out of the ground. Gently push them back down if needed.
VINES	Trim honeysuckles, climbing hydrangeas, and other big vines as needed to control their size. Pull up sweet peas when flowering subsides. Fertilize climbing roses that rebloom in the fall.	After frost kills annual vines, gather up the dead stems and foliage and compost them.	Repair wobbly trellises.
BULBS	If the weather is good, begin digging and dividing crowded clumps of crocuses and daffodils.	Plant spring-flowering bulbs of all types. Dig, dry, and store tender bulbs including caladiums and gladioli.	Where the ground is not frozen, spring flowering bulbs may be planted until mid-December.
SHRUBS	Check plants for problems with insect aphids or spider mites, and treat infestations promptly. Shear hedge plants for the last time. Fertilize reblooming roses.	As deciduous shrubs shed their leaves, rake them up and compost them. Inspect stems for signs of insect scale and spray with horticultural oil according to package directions, if needed.	Evergreen shrubs may be planted where winters are not too severe, Zones 7 to 9.
TREES	If the weather is very dry, provide deep drenches of water to trees planted earlier in the season.	Enjoy the fall show of colorful foliage, and then rake up leaves to interrupt the life cycles of tree-eating pests that lay eggs in fallen leaves. Deposit the leaves in a compost pile where they will turn to leaf mold, an excellent acidifying mulch.	Renew mulches beneath young trees to help moderate soil conditions. Remember to keep mulches from touching the trunks of trees to allow air to circulate and reduce chances of disease and insect infestation.
LAWNS AND GROUNDCOVERS	Fertilize warm-season lawns (except for buffalo grass and centipede) a second time. Where winters are Cold (Zones 2 to 5) fertilize cool-season lawns. Trim edges of groundcover plantings.	Fertilize fescue and other cool-season lawns in the transition zone, those areas between the coldest and warmest Zones. In all parts of the country, rake leaves that pack down on lawns and groundcovers, blocking the light and health-giving air circulation that these plants require.	In the transition zone, areas between the coldest and hottest Zones, fertilize fescue and other cool-season grasses around the end of the year.