Preparing Your Landscape for Winter
by Joyce Friels, Bell County Master Gardener

As you look around your yard, you can see that all the annuals have pretty much died down and
the perennial beds are looking a little shaggy. With all the rain we have had this year, you can spot
several blooms here and there still showing off some color. But you know it is time to do some
preparation for the cold weather days that are sure to come to Central Texas.
It is that time of year again to take a walk through your yard to see how everything is looking.
Remember to take your note pad and pencil to make notes on what you see. You can decide at this
time what plants are overgrown and which need to be thinned out or divided; which plants are
looking scraggy and should be trimmed up; or which plants should be pulled out if they look like
they have bloomed their last blooms this past summer. Some plants will do great in a garden, and
others for hundreds of reasons don’t do very well. Make that note now so you will remember not to
plant the same plant next year; but then, if you liked the plant and it made you smile when you
looked at its blooms, maybe you should try it somewhere else in the yard. It might be happier in
another location. Now is the time to divide and relocate spring blooming perennials and bulbs if you
think they could make a prettier show in another place in your landscape. After you have walked
through your yard, taken notes of all the existing flowerbeds and what needs to be transplanted,
decide where in the yard you would like to make some changes or add new beds. Begin
preparation of these now so they will be ready to receive new plants when spring arrives.

Trees and shrubs can still be planted in early December. If you would like to add some new ones,
now is the time to do so as the soil is still warm and this encourages new root growth and the cool
weather enables them to go dormant which reduces stress. Deadhead any roses that are already
established and remove discolored blooms to keep insect pests from spending the winter in them.
However, don’t prune roses now as this will stimulate new growth and any new growth can be
damaged by upcoming freezing weather. Wait until February to prune all your roses. Also, this is
the time of year to prune any existing trees and shrubs, both deciduous and evergreen. You should
only prune out dead limbs and those inside small limbs that cross each other. This will let air
circulate better and be healthier for the plant. Do not top out any tree, that is, cut off all the limbs
to just two or three on the main trunk! In my opinion, this is the worst thing that can be done to a
tree, no matter the size. The tree may sprout new limbs and foliage in the spring, but the tree will
eventually die.

Continue watering all your plants if the ground is dry. In this part of Texas, cool season nursery
plants can still be planted. You can also direct seed poppies, larkspur, sweet pea, marigolds, and
wild flowers. If the weather remains mild you can still plant irises and spring blooming bulbs such
as daffodils and hyacinths. Start preparing the beds for their winter nap. Trim out any dead foliage
on plants that are happy, clear out all dead debris around each plant, and place new mulch around
each one. Put new mulch around those plants that are still putting out blooms. Spring bulbs that
are already established require no care now. Remember, the weather in Central Texas can be
mildly pleasant then a chilly cold front can blow in quickly and unexpectedly. If a "blue norther"
blows in, your tender perennials and still blooming flowers need to be covered. This can be done
easily by just placing a bed sheet or light blanket over them holding the edges down with rocks or
soil. This method is enough to keep the cold wind and cold temperatures from harming them.
Other coverings such as sheets of plastic or buckets can also be used. Be sure to remove the
covering when the sun comes out and the temperature rises. Also, tender plants that are in
containers should be brought inside at this time. Place them in a sheltered area such as the garage
where they will be out of the wind. Newly planted trees and shrubs can be covered with water as
the frozen water on the leaves and branches will protect them from the freezing temperature.

After making these assessments and preparing the old and new flowerbeds in your yard for the
winter, start planning the design of color you would like to see next year. Remember, there is
always room in a garden for more plants. When spring arrives, you will be glad you made all the
plants comfortable for the winter because they will show their appreciation by blooming brightly
and abundantly for you. The new beds you designed will bring more dimensions to your landscape.
Enjoy your winter efforts, as they will provide a happy garden for you and your friends in the future.