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CLEAN-UP TIME!

Now that the growing season is finished, it's time to put our gardens to bed. You probably just want to hang up the shovel and be done, but there's still work to do!

First of all let's talk about the annuals. Pull out all the dead plants and do away with them. This includes both flowering plants such as your marigolds, petunias and geraniums, or veggies like tomatoes, peppers and beans. If they didn't have any disease problems, add them to the compost pile. If they did, the garbage can is waiting!

Perennials need your attention, too. Cut the dead foliage back so that stems are about 1-2" tall. Like the annuals, if there was no disease, add them to the compost - otherwise, again, the garbage can beckons. If you want to leave a few things standing for winter interest such as Autumn Joy sedum, or some of the yarrows, that's great. Just be sure to cut them back before new growth begins in the spring.

Another thing that can be left in place until spring is ornamental grass. It usually holds up quite nicely to wintery weather, but you do need to cut it back before new green leaves emerge in spring. Ever have a "bad hair day"? That's what your ornamental grass would look like if you never cut it back. There would be new grass, old grass, plumes, both old and new - not a pretty sight to behold! There are a couple exceptions to the cutting back rule and those would be Blue Avena Grass and Blue Fescue. These both retain their blue/green color through winter and into spring and don't need to be cut off. As the growing season progresses, dead blades can easily be pulled from the plant to maintain a tidy appearance.

If your garden contains hybrid roses, those must also be dealt with around the end of November. Mound up soil or mulch to a depth of 6-8" over the base of the plant. This is where the pretty hybrid rose is grafted onto a hardier root stock. The mulch is to protect that region from our fluctuating winter temperatures. Remove the mulch around the beginning of April to be ready for the next growing season.

Get ready to put your feet up and sit in front of the fireplace. Don't hide the hose, though. You'll need to pull it out and water your gardens every couple weeks if the weather is dry!