Winter Gardening Chores

Winter is a great time to do some much needed cleaning in and around your garden and landscape. As the days slowly begin to get longer, take advantage of those extra few minutes of daylight to get outside and garden! This is prime time to trim back your roses, rake up the leaf debris, cut back unsightly perennials, do some winter pruning, and start planning for the spring.

Roses are always a little tricky when it comes to pruning. Experts say that if your area is prone to bad winter weather, the roses should be pruned back to about 18 inches after the first heavy freeze. If your weather tends to be mild in nature, you can wait until just before bud break in early spring to prune. I know, I know, you are reading this and thinking I am crazy. Robeson County falls in the middle of this range. Use your best judgment. I have had success in both cases.

Most people wait until early spring to clean up a lot of the leaf debris in their landscapes and gardens, but many times this comes too little too late. Many fungal spores and insect problems will overwinter in the debris left beneath your plants. If left until early spring, these problems can then re-infect your plants. Remove all the debris and if it is not contaminated, compost the material. If you know that a specific plant had a fungal or insect problem, remove the debris and take it offsite.

Cutting back perennials is my absolute favorite job! From lantana to liriope, if you have not done so already, cut it back now to get ready for the spring growth. I was out in my yard the other day cutting back my lantana. I got this great idea to put it in my trashcan for the meantime and leave it in the garage. I was hoping my husband would get the hint and take care of it for me… Well my husband did not get the hint, and the nice warm air in my garage was a great place for all those nice little spider eggs to hatch. Yikes!

Winter is a great time to prune any of your woody trees and shrubs. Pruning should be done to remove diseased, damaged, and overlapping or rubbing branches. No more than one third of a plant should be removed at any one time. If you have specific questions about pruning, or you just need some extra guidance, make sure you contact me to sign up for our free pruning class coming up on January 25!
Once you finish all the clean up in your garden and landscape, do not forget to start planning for the spring. I always like to draw out a map of my gardens to find holes where I can place new varieties and try fun things. Think of the seasonality of your gardens and landscape. Is there something flowering throughout the growing season? Can you place a plant for winter interest? Should you fill in spaces with some annuals this spring? These are all questions to ask yourself so you can be ready when the warm weather is upon us.

Good luck with your garden clean up, and do not hesitate to call me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, with any comments and questions, or to sign up for the upcoming pruning workshop at (910) 671-3276 or send me an E-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu or visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.