

In the Garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



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What to do in early December

1. Protect your garden from the vagaries of winter. Wind, ice, snow and the extreme, dry cold can wreak havoc.

Cover your vegetable bed with fleece or clear plastic. This will also warm the soil earlier so you can work it in spring.

Vulnerable plants like roses and boxwoods need protection. I staple burlap, bought by the yard, onto vertical strips of wood set about three feet apart to form a fence or screen of sorts. I place them around the plants and stick the bottom of the wood supports into the ground. Inside of this barrier, I fill in with dry leaves up to about a third of the height of the plant. This keeps the wind and bitter cold from hurting the plant, particularly at its roots.

Mulch the flower beds. Do this after the ground is well and truly frozen as you do not want the heaving of the soil to lift the mulch. The other reason to wait for the ground to get cold is that it reduces the possibility of critters making a cozy winter home between the soil and mulch. I use nuggets of cedar. The rich dark brown color is attractive and blends in well with the soil. The nuggets take longer to breakdown and so last longer.

2. Bring in containers like watering cans or turn them over if storing outside. You want to prevent frost damage.

3. Continue setting aside those garden and seed catalogs!

4. Keep up with maintaining the bird feeders.
5. Take a walk around the garden and make notes of plants that need to be replaced or moved. See where you can add more plants. Assess successes and failures. This past summer was so dry that I lost a good portion of my vinca, which I use as a ground cover in a certain area. That will be remedied as soon as winter is over.



Shobha Vanchiswar has been gardening all her life, the last 19 years in Chappaqua. She received the Golden Trowel Award for garden design in 2007 from Garden Design magazine. She has a garden design business, Seeds of Design.