

Winter 2020 Northeast Region Horticulture Hints

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Post-Frost Maintenance

After the first frost or freeze of the season (usually between Halloween & Thanksgiving), there is much to be done in the flowerbed. If you are like me, marigolds, zinnias, periwinkles & lantana are left alone to bloom until the first frost comes along and burns them down. I always enjoy seeing summer flowers catch their second wind in the fall. The colors seem to deepen as the temperatures become milder. Given, by now most gardeners have long since removed summer annuals and replaced with fall/winter bedding plants like pansies, snapdragons & dianthus. But even after our first frost, it is certainly not too late to plant those fall flowers.

Figure 1 & 2. Frost injured foliage of perennials should be cut back to the crown of the plant.



Even a light frost or freeze will let you know which plants need cutting back/removing and which are frost tolerant. Here are some post-frost/freezing flowerbed tasks:

- Most summer flowering annuals & bedding plants are not frost tolerant and will need to be pulled up.
- Collect seed if desired, shake off excess soil from roots, and discard.
- Summer blooming perennials such as lantana & Mexican heather will need to be cut back to the ground.
- frost burnt foliage of perennials will persist through the winter, harboring insects & leaf debris, and also not providing much visual appeal to the winter landscape. Always remove at soil level.
- Once all frost damaged foliage has been removed, now is a good time to take inventory of what remains and what can be added.

- The gaps in your flowerbed can be filled with all the beautiful and enticing bedding plants that are available in every garden center: pansies, snapdragons, petunias, chrysanthemums, dianthus, dusty miller, ornamental cabbages just to name a few.
- Your frost tolerant plants will likely require some upkeep at this point:
 - Remove daylily stalks and dead foliage
 - dead head or prune back leggy plant material of perennials such as blue salvia, blanketflower, guara, daisies, mums & verbenas.
 - You may even have some snapdragons or petunias that made it through the summer from the year before; these too will likely need some trimming.

Incorporate compost into the soil, apply a slow release fertilizer, put down a fresh layer of mulch, and enjoy a beautiful winter flowerbed all the way until spring.

Figures 3-6. Most evergreen perennials and shrubs are very cold tolerant.

