

PNW Month-by-Month Gardening: Tips for Cultivating a More Resilient Garden

In gardening, as in life in general, timing can be everything. Resiliency – the ability for plantings to recover from environmental stress such as drought or cold – can be improved with certain timing and methods of gardening practices. Weed and mulch in late winter to improve soil water retention in summer. Water deeply and infrequently to conserve water and promote deeper rooting. Plant trees in fall for stronger establishment. Listed below are some highlights of practices and timing that work toward cultivating a more resilient garden and landscape.

January

Start a monthly photo journal of your garden and look over older photos of your garden to make plans for needed improvements over the coming year.



February

Nip it in the bud! Seedlings of woody and perennial weeds are easy to sight and uproot this month: English ivy, English laurel, spurge laurel, dandelion, false dandelion, buttercup and more. Get them out early to avoid competition with the vital early season growth of desired plants. Effective tools to extract weeds with minimal soil impacts are the hori-hori soil knife, saw toothed hand scythe, and a spade fork.

March

Plant trees and shrubs by the end of March to promote some root growth before the moisture-demanding new growth begins in spring. Add coarse shredded leaves or wood chip mulch around new plantings to help retain soil moisture longer into the growing season.

April

In honor of Earth Day, treat your garden soil with gentle care. Low-till and no-till practices help protect vital pore space and conserve soil moisture. Don't work or tromp on wet ground. Apply coarse-textured mulch like shredded leaves and wood chips to protect the soil and provide habitat for vital soil building organisms.

May

Mulch-mow lawns to cycle nutrients and organic matter for better soil and turf health. The fine clippings also support soil building organisms and decomposers that keep thatch buildup in check.

June

Make sure new plantings have adequate water, with enough time between waterings to let the soil partially dry out. This preserves soil structure and avoids drowning out vital soil organisms and plant roots. Avoid early season drought stress for better drought resiliency later in the summer.



July

Mow lawns ½-inch higher in summer to help reduce heat stress. Don't prune shrubs or hedges hard in summer, save hard pruning for the dormant season or early spring.

August

Begin to taper off irrigation rates toward the end of the month for regularly watered landscape plants so that growth can harden off before the dormant season.

September

Provide a slow deep soak of water for non-irrigated trees and shrubs that show symptoms of drought stress so they will be well hydrated going into the dormant season.

October

Optimal planting season for trees, shrubs, vines, and many perennials starts now through March, whenever the weather is warm and dry enough to work comfortably outdoors.

November

Leave some leaves to protect the soil and maintain habitat for beneficial soil organisms that continue to work in the damp fall conditions. Mulch mow thin layers of tree leaves into the lawn. Let some leaves lay where they land in garden beds. Save and compost the rest to use later. Cycling fallen leaves into the garden could be the single most vital practice to improve soil health and plant resiliency.


December

Organize to protect plants from potential deep freezes. Gather plants in small containers undercover or surround the pots with shredded leaves or wood chips. Inverted baskets and light blankets serve for quick cover when a cold front is expected.



Find more timely tips for sustainable garden care in Pacific Northwest Month-by-Month Gardening, Cool Springs Press.

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