

# Native Plant Garden Winter Care

Created and Compiled by Will Drews

## Key Points:

- Balance aesthetics with environmental benefits
- “Messier” = better for wildlife
  - Stems and plant structure provide habitat for wildlife
  - Seeds and fruits serve as a winter food source for birds and other wildlife
- If needing to tidy up, try to leave a foot or two of stems left for pollinators and other insects
  - Can leave the cuttings in a brush pile or compost pile
  - If material is diseased, bag and discard off site.
  - Can cut back the rest in April or May
- Some natives have attractive seedheads/fruits or stems (like warm season grasses, Northern Sea Oats, Redosier Dogwood, etc.), so definitely leave those to give dormant garden interest.
  - Additionally, some species of birds use seedheads and fruit as a winter source of food (e.g. dogwoods, Purple Coneflower, etc.), so try to leave those plants alone until Spring.
- Good time to collect seeds
  - As you’re pruning dormant material back, can bag those desirable seeds for next year’s plantings!
- If the plant is an aggressive reseeder (e.g. Late Boneset, Goldenrods, Common Evening Primrose, etc.), you can remove the seedheads at this time to prevent further spread throughout the landscape.
- For shrubs and trees, search out species specific information on timing and how much to prune.
- Leave the leaves, if possible.
  - Some wildlife overwinter in leaf litter.
  - Leaves provide a natural mulch and will decompose naturally.
  - They add organic matter to the soil.
  - If unwanted in current location, you can move leaves to an area on site where they can compost.
- Weed out unwanted plants like winter annuals and biennials (e.g. henbit, purple deadnettle, invasive thistles, etc.)
- Final point: this is a great time to get to know your plants better and appreciate what they are doing for the environment. This should be fun and enjoyable process!



Removal of Wild Bergamot stems with Powdery Mildew



Above: Common Evening Primrose cut back in landscape out front.

Below: Common Evening Primrose stems not pruned. These will be left until April/May before being cut back.



## For Further Information:

### Links

- Tree Pruning - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C\\_6vKc8mt\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_6vKc8mt_A)
- Shrub Pruning - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSxO1PCcH8s>
- Winter Perennial Care - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSHogJTXYI>
- Maintenance - <https://landscapeforlife.org/maintenance/>
- Lawn Weed ID - <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/lawn-weed-id-and-management>
- Landscape Uses of Native Plants - <https://indiananativeplants.org/landscaping/landscape-uses-of-native-plants/>
- Collecting and Using Your Own Wildflower Seed - <https://xerces.org/publications/guidelines/collecting-and-using-your-own-wildflower-seed>
- Putting Your Native Plant Garden to Bed for Winter - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJuGfxFBqGg>

### Books

- *Go Native!: Gardening With Native Plants and Wildflowers in the Lower Midwest* by Carolyn Harstad
- *Got Shade?: A "Take It Easy" Approach for Today's Gardener* by Carolyn Harstad
- *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy
- *The New American Landscape: Leading Voices on the Future of Sustainable Gardening* compiled by Thomas Christopher
- *Bees: An Identification and Native Plant Forage Guide* by Heather Holm
- *Attracting Native Pollinators* by the Xerces Society
- *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* by Michael Dirr