



Stirling Pollinator Garden—Sara DeWeerd

Creation Care Yard and Garden Clean-up Tips

The best thing you can do for critters in your garden is to **wait until spring** to clean-up! Pollinator insects, toads, birds, and other beneficial critters need food and shelter for the winter, and fallen leaves, woody stems from perennials, and seed heads provide these!

- **Don't rake your leaves this fall!** Several butterfly species hibernate as adults in leaf litter. It's better to rake in spring after insects have woken up. If you must clean up your yard, one option is to mulch the leaves with a lawnmower while insects are still active and the weather is still warm. Mulched leaves quickly disappear into your lawn and provide some cover for insects, and they break down and feed your lawn in spring.
- If you have planted native species such as in a pollinator garden, leave them standing through the winter - they still have a job to do!
- **Don't cut back** your perennials and ornamental grasses until spring. This protects the crown and roots of the plants from the cold while providing cover for birds as they forage for food. Leave seed heads on plants that birds enjoy and that don't self-seed too vigorously. Seeds provide food for migratory birds as well as winter resident birds.
- **Hollow, woody stems** are an important habitat for native bees to raise their young. They provide shelter for pupae through the winter and are used by some bees in the summer. You may have seen "Mason Bee Hotels" for sale, which are based on these hollow stems. However, it is safer for bees not to lay their eggs all in one place. Using stems that are naturally spaced apart protects bees' offspring from disease and predation. **Leave 8-14" standing** when you cut back woody stems and ornamental grasses, and wait to cut them back until Spring, leaving them for next winter's guests.
- **Don't over-mulch.** Ground-nesting bees like bumble bees need patches of bare soil to burrow and start next year's colonies. Leave a spot or two bare where you can.

So when should you clean up? **Wait until temperatures are 10°C or above for 7 consecutive days.** This gives insects time to wake up and climb out of the leaf litter. By leaving this habitat we ensure that beneficial, predatory insects have a place to over-winter. This means that in the spring when pests/prey insects emerge, the beneficial insects will have an early meal and a reason to stay and protect your garden. This is a great way to achieve balance and keep the pest insect populations in check so they provide food for good bugs without damaging your garden. Next season's bees and butterflies are already here in winter, so let's take care of them!

More Info: <http://nativeplantherald.prairienursery.com/2019/09/meaningful-maintenancefall-clean-up-with-positive-impact/>
"Spring Clean Up Done Right" <https://savvygardening.com/spring-garden-clean-done-right/>