

TIME TO PUT YOUR GARDEN TO BED

Interview with CPVGC Member LoJuana Davis, Written by Kathy Dennis



Many of our members enjoyed seeing garden club member LoJuana Davis' vegetable and flower gardens at a club September kick-off luncheon, or at a "Wine in the Garden" event. Several have asked LoJuana how she cares for her gardens, since LoJuana does 100% of her own gardening. In response to the request of several members, I sat down with LoJuana and posed the question: "How do you ready your gardens for winter?"

LoJuana began by emphasizing that she is not a trained gardener and her expertise comes as the result of years of hands-on experiences. She continued that there are several good ways of winterizing gardens; her method one of many that just happens to work best for her. She and her late husband, Dean, owned a wheat and cattle farm in Linden, Colorado for 45 years on the eastern plains. On the farm, her garden was 5 acres in size consisting of a huge vegetable garden that included several fruit trees and a magnificent flower garden. LoJuana downplayed the size and beauty of her garden. But the fact that her garden was featured in the Farm and Ranch Living Magazine in an article title "The Prettiest Place in the Country" speaks volumes.

VEGETABLE GARDEN:

Once the frost has wilted the vegetable plants, clear your garden entirely of plant debris as plants can hold insects and disease that you will want to remove from your garden. Then turn over the soil with a spade and let it sit through winter. LoJuana often goes one step further by spreading chicken, sheep or cow manure on the soil and roto-tilling it into the soil. She mixes manure with a bag of peat moss. This second step can also be done in early spring. LoJuana puts cuttings from her petunia plants on top of her strawberry plants and covers the petunia cuttings with a little wire mesh. This insulates the strawberry plants.

FLOWER GARDEN:

ANNUALS: Pull out or cut to the ground. Some annuals like snapdragons may come back year after year but they are not usually as tall or profuse as the first year.

PERENNIALS: (asters, hollyhocks, phlox, goldenrod, etc.) Perennials should not be fertilized in the fall as that encourages growth. After the first frost, cut off the stems about three inches from the ground. Discard all cut leaves and plants that appear diseased or blighted. Then lay the healthy cut stems and leaves back down over the same area as a mulch to protect the roots from the extreme winter cold. You could also use leaves mixed with pine needles. LoJuana warned not to make the leaf mulch too thick as it will smother the new growth in the spring.

COMPOSTING: LoJuana composts her flower beds. She often does it in the fall but it could also be done in the spring. Put down two inches of compost where the plants were and work into the soil at least 4-5 inches deep. She usually uses Eko Brand Compost, a Colorado product. An alternative is a mixture of peat mixed with sheep or cow manure. For those with hard packed soil, the peat will lighten the soil making it easier to work. LoJuana noted that club member Carol Hummel uses Natures' Pride Compost, also very



good. LoJuana reads the contents of her compost bags carefully and often. She encourages gardeners to find a brand they think gives the best results and stay with it. However, if your flowers or vegetables are not like you remember, check out your compost. The company may have changed its ingredients or the percentages.

WILD FLOWER SEEDS: Wild flower seeds can be cast out in fall or spring. In nature, it would happen in the autumn. If done in the fall, they will probably settle down into the soil naturally. Make sure they are covered by only an 1/8 inch of soil.

TUBERS AND BULBS: Irises and lilies should be redone (divided) in late summer. Do this when they become crowded so not necessary every year.

GLADIOLAS: Dig up these bulbs in the fall. Put in a basket or bag with lots of holes so that air circulates. Keep in a cool spot. They can be refrigerated but not necessary.

DAHLIAS: Dig up tubers/bulbs in the fall. She uses her cut dahlia leaves as mulch over the area where her hollyhock plants are located. LoJuana said there are many ideas on how to keep them over the winter. This is what she does. She drills holes the circumference of a five-gallon bucket about four-five inches from the bottom. Into the holes, she inserts long screws. Then she cuts a piece of screen or ceiling grid the size of the bucket and lays the screen onto the screws. About three inches of water is added to the bucket. The water level needs to be maintained over the winter. She digs up her dahlia bulbs and leaves a 2-3 inch stem on each. Wash off all of the dirt. Lay out until they dry but do not let them freeze. Once dry, lay them onto the screen in the bucket but do not stack them up as they will mold easily. Cover the bulbs with a few sheets of newspaper. Check often over the winter for mold. Brush off any mold that appears or discard the bulb if mold is extensive. The new growth will come from eyes on the tubers so that area needs to be kept healthy.

DAFFODILS: Daffodil bulbs can be planted until the soil freezes.

ROSES: To this question, she began by noting that several rose experts in our club could give a more in-depth explanation. "If you do not do anything else for your roses in the fall, you should mound soil around their base about 5-6 inches from ground level". In the spring, this mound should be removed to where live growth is. She quits fertilizing her roses in August and does not cut back her roses until spring.

TREES: Fallen pine needles can cover native and barren dirt areas over the winter but should be raked up from grassy areas soon as the needles fall. Castle Pines' elevation is too low for aspens but we do have some in the area. Some aspens get "black leaf". The blight makes for an unsightly tree but will not normally kill the aspen. If your aspen has "black leaf", the fallen leaves under those trees should be raked up and discarded immediately to discourage the blight's return.

LoJuana and Dean purchased their Castle Pines home seven years ago. She regrets one step they should have done better. The soil in Castle Pines is very poor. They did amend their soil but they should have used triple the amount of soil amendments suggested. She said their neighbor used more soil amendments and had it roto-tilled deeper. LoJuana laments that plants have always grown easier in the neighbors' soil. She ended with a caution to all new homeowners and those redoing their cultivated areas to "DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME - AMEND, AMEND!"