

## Winterizing Your Garden

with Erin Dilworth, Garden Manager of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Gardens,  
Land & Garden Preserve

For those unable to attend the Brooklin Garden Club meeting on October 18, the Program Committee is sending along highlights from Erin Dilworth's presentation. See below for tips and best practices that you may consider for your own gardens.

### **Brief overview of the Abby Gardens**

Designed by Beatrix Ferrand and planted between 1926 and 1931 for Abby Aldrich and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., their gardens specialized in annual plants that abounded in color during the eight weeks of summer when they were in residence. Today's garden contains 70% perennials, all of which are propagated by seed or cuttings in Land and Garden Preserve greenhouses. Each year their display of annuals is redesigned.

1. Dismantling your garden
  - Wait until October, when plants have outlived the season and garden pollinators have had time to feed on fading blooms and foliage.
  - If your garden abounds in annuals, pull them all out and leave the garden clean and tidy.
  - If your garden abounds in perennials
    - consider allowing them to remain for winter insects and seasonal interest
    - make sure to cut back or dig out any infected plants.
  - If you have an irrigation system, remove all staples holding down hoses and blow them out.
  - Remove all plant stakes to preserve them for next season.
  
2. Moving perennials
  - Instead of transplanting in spring, move perennials around the second weekend of September. With a month or so to establish roots before a frost, plants will be stronger when they emerge in spring.
  - Cut perennials down to a foot or less before moving, dig gently around roots leaving ample protection of dirt, and move into a large hole that you then fill with soil. DON'T fertilize.
  
3. Amending soil
  - Land & Garden Preserve uses only organic matter from Coast of Maine. Their blend of manure and peat moss is the preferred mix at the moment. They apply no other fertilizer.
  - Other composts consisting of leaf matter, grass clippings, and garden compost could be used. Seaweed, at a depth of 2 – 3 inches, is also beneficial but should be rinsed well first.

- Lime can be used every year in acid soils, but it is a good idea to check soil chemistry every few years. Abby Gardens tests soil every 5 years.
  - Erin top dresses soil with compost every spring. No wood-chip mulch is used in Abby Gardens, in part because of scale and in part because of the large number of annuals planted in the garden.
  - Top dressing offers aesthetic benefits (for instance, covering irrigation systems) and contributes to plant health.
  - Abby Gardens' soils are never tilled nor dug up to incorporate different materials. The best horticultural practices today discourage tilling gardens, as has been done in the recent past.
  - Those with heavy clay soils may need to amend them with more organic matter. Adding organic matter to your soil yearly is the only thing that will help even out unsuitable soil.
4. Dahlias & tender bulbs including gladiolas
- Before digging up, frost should hit plants first, turning them black. Those who leave the region before a deep frost can expedite the hardening process by cutting plants down to a foot and then allowing them to remain in soil for two weeks before digging up their bulbs.
  - Dahlia tubers benefit from being dug up with a turning fork, not a shovel.
    - Large clumps of dahlias can be split up and replanted as two or more plants, but each partial tuber must have an eye.
    - Tubers must be completely dry before storing.
  - Tubers and bulbs, with some dirt still attached or not, should be stored below 50° but above freezing.
  - Throw them into a brown-paper bag covered mounded over with peat moss to protect them from fungus.
  - Given depletion of peat bogs, some gardeners have turned to vermiculite or to a dirt-free potting mix.
5. Protecting soil over the winter
- Without the snowpack that was once dependable in coastal Maine, gardeners must protect their soil.
  - Spruce and fir boughs offer good protection.
  - Using mulch around tender perennials (such as delphiniums, monarda, anemone, echinacea, heuchera, scabiosa, achillea, and lavender) as well as covering with brush can be beneficial.
  - DON'T cover with boughs or mulch until soil is completely frozen in mid-December; otherwise one is making a cozy house for voles and other varmints.
  - Remove cover brush in April, before the new growth emerges.

Happy Gardening!

