

### **3 Good Tips for Gardeners**

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#### **How should I prepare my garden tools for winter?**

Proper care of garden tools and equipment prolongs their lifetime, prevents costly repairs and improves their performance. In fall, remove caked-on soil from shovels, spades, hoes and rakes with a wire brush or a stiff putty knife. Wash the tools with a strong stream of water, then dry. Sharpen the blades of hoes, shovels and spades. Wipe the metal surfaces with an oily rag or spray with WD-40. Sand rough wooden handles, then wipe with linseed oil to prevent drying and cracking. Hang or store the tools in a dry location. Drain water from garden hoses. To prevent kinking, store hoses on reels or coil and place on a flat surface.

Start the lawn mower and let it run until it is out of gas. Change the oil on mowers with four-cycle engines. Clean the air filter. Check the spark plug and change it if worn. Remove grass and other debris from the underside of the lawn mower. Sharpen the mower blade. Finally, store the lawn mower in a dry location.

#### **When should I prune back my clematis vines?**

Clematis varieties are usually placed into three groups based on their flowering characteristics. Some varieties bloom in June or July on the current season's growth. Others bloom on the previous year's growth (old wood). The third group blooms on both old and new wood. Despite these differences in flowering characteristics, pruning practices for the clematis types are basically the same in Iowa. Wait until new growth begins in early spring and then prune out the dead wood. Cut back the vines to the highest point where new growth is emerging.

#### **Will standard fluorescent bulbs provide sufficient light for houseplants?**

For the indoor gardener, a fluorescent fixture containing two 40-watt tubes (one cool white and one warm white) provides adequate light for houseplants. Plant lights, developed specifically for growing plants indoors, are another option. While plant lights are an excellent light source for houseplants, they are expensive and generally not worth the additional cost.

Since light intensity decreases rapidly as the distance from the light source increases, place the fluorescent light fixture within 4 to 6 inches of the tops of the plants. Leave the lights on for 12 to 14 hours each day.

#### **Ask the ISU Experts**

Got gardening questions? Contact the Hortline at (515) 294-3108 (Monday-Friday; 10 a.m. - 12 noon and 1 - 4:30 p.m.) or send an e-mail to [hortline@iastate.edu](mailto:hortline@iastate.edu). For more gardening information visit us at Yard and Garden Online at [www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu)