

**Fall Care of Perennials**  
**Rick Abrahamson**  
**Week of October 19, 2009**

Often I am asked about winter protection for roses and other perennial plants. Depending on planting location many perennials can be left alone for the winter and they will do fine. However, any that are not totally hardy should at least be covered with mulch. Four to six inches of straw, wood chips or shredded leaves work well. Do not use whole leaves, as they tend to mat down and do not insulate as well. In addition, adding some of those wonderful leaves to your perennial, annual, and vegetable gardens will increase organic matter if tilled into the soil. These can be tilled in the fall or the spring depending on the use of the bed.

Non-hardy roses should be covered before wintery weather starts. This means by the end of October or very early November. Consider the Minnesota tip method to cover your roses. A trench is dug out from the rose and all of the plant parts are buried in the soil. Mulch is added on top of this with chicken wire to keep it from blowing off. This method works because the ground is always warmer than the air. The soil gives the roses an extra layer of insulation when compared to using rose cones or other techniques.

After the ground starts to freeze borderline hardy perennials should be cut back and covered with a thick layer of shredded leaves, straw, or pine needles. Hardy perennials can be cut back with a mower or shear and covered with a three or four inch layer of mulch. Remember to remove the mulch as it thaws in the spring. Pull or cut foliage of hosta after it freezes or before new growth in the spring. The foliage should rake up rather easily. Removal of all hosta foliage is a very important part of slug control. If you clean up in the spring this is also good time to divide your hostas.

Mulch does several things for the garden. Organic matter and nutrients are added when mulch is used. This depends on the mulching material and how quickly it is broken down by microorganisms. Never use a mulching material with component sizes larger than an inch as these take many years to decompose and will tie up nitrogen and may cause deficiency symptoms in many sensitive plants. My advice when putting your gardens to bed is to think about the plants and in what conditions they thrive in nature. If you emulate this then your gardens should grow very well.

If you have more questions or need additional information feel free to call on me at 605-394-2188 or email to [ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu](mailto:ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu). Be sure to check out our website at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html>.

**Upcoming Events of Interest**  
**(please call for more information)**

November 21 – Bulb Forcing Workshop – Rapid City