

Raining Gold

Don't clean up your garden this fall

It's raining leaves of orange, red and yellow. The mounting pile from those deciduous gorgeous maples is heavily on your mind. Your spare time whiling away the brisk autumn days is mentally being eaten up by the impending chore of tidying up the garden, bagging up those leaves, cutting down those perennials and hunkering down for the winter.

Don't do it. That's right, I said it. Leave it all

there. I triple-dog-dare you not to do the big ol' rake up 'n' clean up this fall. OK, not all of it, at least. But the "cut it all down and make it bare" approach to gardening does not have to be the answer, especially in an organic garden.

I know this declaration might rock your world. But one of the best ways to feed your garden is to feed your soil. And to feed your soil you need compost. Those things raining down from the

trees? They are gold to your soil. Mulching your garden with leaves over the winter helps build good things into your garden's soil. In addition, leaves can drastically cut back on the weeds come spring by preventing seeds from being able to germinate. In the past several years we've kept our garden mulched and marginally cleaned up over the winter, and we've seen a huge



Sassy Gardener
BY LEANN LOCHER

decrease in the amount of weeds needing to be pulled.

One of the coolest things about not cleaning up your garden this fall? You're doing good things for the birds. Tom Costello of the Portland Audubon Society says: "When leaves and twigs are on the ground, they provide habitat for the little critters like worms and spiders. This in turn feeds towhees and robins. It's a beneficial cycle."

He says even if you have to clean up a little, that's OK, just as long as you leave a brush pile somewhere in your yard. "Spent flower heads and fruits from trees are great to leave for the winter," Tom says. "The varied thrush is on our watch list, and this is precisely the kind of food and habitat they need."

My leave-it-alone mantra for fall cleanup does not include diseased plants. Those definitely need to be cut back and disposed of. Rotting tomatoes and gourds? Get them into your compost pile, stat.

Finally, it's all about how you look at it. I think grasses, like our Calamagrostis "Karl Forrester," provide great shape and form in the winter garden when so many of our perennials are asleep and shrubs are bare. Fringed with ice or snow, they increase my recognition of the seasons and continue to play a role during this barren time. 10

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Leaving grasses, like this Calamagrostis "Karl Forrester," provide form and function for an overwintering garden.

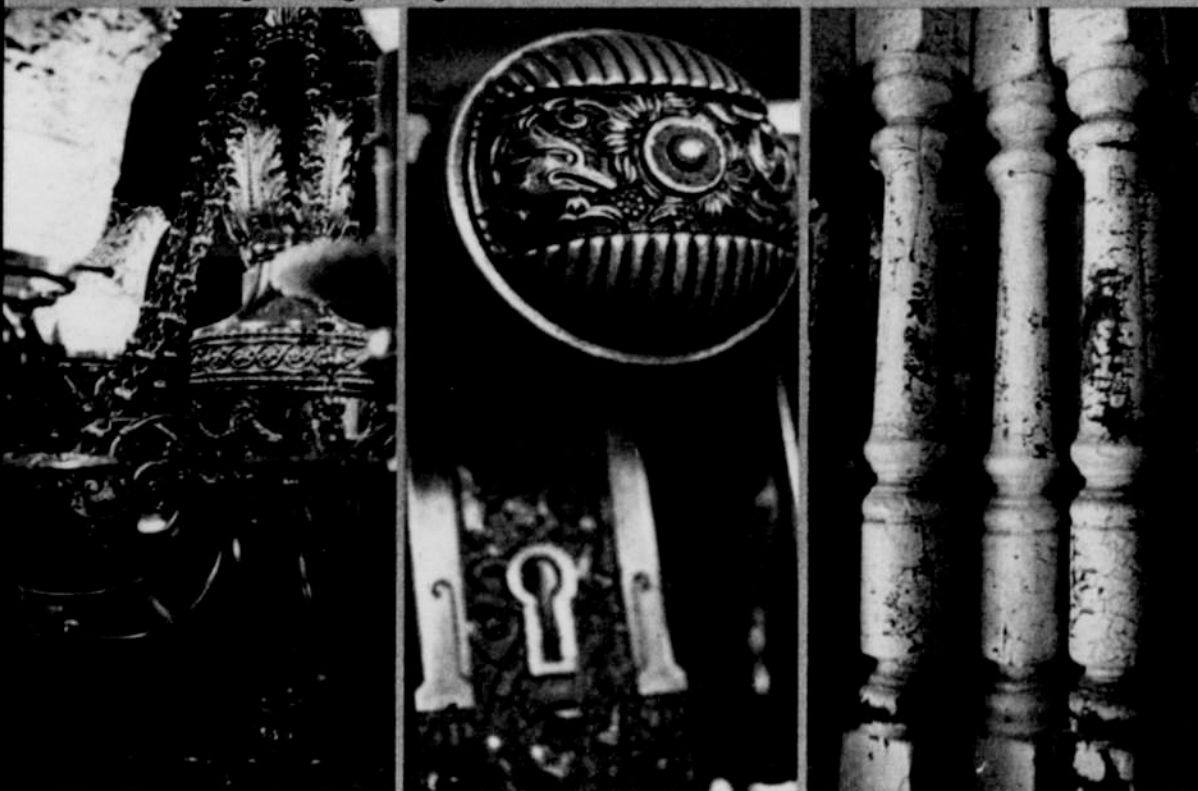
Upcoming Events to Keep Gardeners Busy

- Go on a nature walk with one of Portland's most engaging naturalists, Mike Houck, from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Nov. 19. Audubon Society of Portland's Wild in the City program sponsors this free event; you'll walk four miles along the Eastbank Esplanade and the 160-acre Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge. To register call 503-292-6855 or visit www.audubonportland.org.
- Create a beautiful and different kind of Thanksgiving holiday centerpiece during this class 11 a.m. Nov. 22 at Farmington Gardens, 21815 S.W. Farmington Road in Beaverton. Cost is \$30. To register call 503-649-4568.
- One of the best places in town to get garden gifts, greens, wreaths and holiday décor is the Portland Garden Club's Market Basket event. Don't miss this from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dec. 6 at 1132 S.W. Vista Ave.

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