what to do: Idaho Firewise Garden Calendar

January/February

The Idaho Firewise gardeners focus primarily on greenhouse work during January and February - keeping our propagated plants watered and healthy, up-potting plant material as needed, keeping up on plant database work and labels, etc.

Our propagation efforts usually result in several hundred plants. Many of the plants will end up being planted at the homesite as well as distributed to our satellite sites as needed. Many of the firewise plants will get delivered to our Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management partners for various giveaways and/or projects. We have also donated plant material to local residents or neighborhoods that demonstrate continual interest or efforts in firewise landscaping.

Garden tasks when weather permits:

- Leaf litter and other debris clean-up
- Check fencing and make adjustments where needed

Other tasks:

- Attend horticulture seminars, conferences
- Interview interested parties for spring and summer internships
- Offer Idaho Firewise Certification Course to landscapers, nurseries, designers and architects

Resource: https://www.highcountrygardens.com/gardening
March and April are very busy months in the garden. This is the time to work around spring rains to keep up with emerging weeds and to finish any tasks that were not completed during the previous year’s fall clean-up.

**Garden tasks:**

- Perennial cutbacks (anything not completed from fall) and general plant clean-up
- **Leaf litter and plant debris removal**
- Weed removal, each and every gardening session - garden raking also improves the overall appearance
- Grape vine pruning, early March
- Shrub pruning if deemed necessary (e.g. roses, before flower buds form), only to shape or to remove dead, dying, or diseased branches - this task is dependent on species, do not prune spring blooming shrubs yet as this disrupts the blooming cycle (e.g. forsythia, quince, lilac, mock orange)
- Apply **pre-emergent** to combat problematic weed seed - time application with coinciding spring rains, generally done in late March or early April at the homesite
- Remove duff from sheep fescue lawn; complete a spring fertilizer application for sheep fescue and turf plots (note: Idaho Firewise does not fertilizer anything else in the garden in order to better test for plant performance)

Resource: [https://www.almanac.com/content/spring-pruning-guide-trees-and-shrubs](https://www.almanac.com/content/spring-pruning-guide-trees-and-shrubs)

Resource: [https://www.johnson.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/agent-articles/trees-shrubs/pruning-shrubs-in-the-spring.html](https://www.johnson.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/agent-articles/trees-shrubs/pruning-shrubs-in-the-spring.html)
May and June are colorful months in the garden. Many firewise plants are blooming at once including red hot poker, penstemon, rose, mock orange, ice plant, evening primrose, globe mallow, etc.

**Garden tasks:**

- Spring plantings of any new material, give plants extra water until established
- Check irrigation zones and clock on a regular basis to trouble-shoot any issues, fix as needed
- Re-applications of decomposed granite mulch, as needed throughout the garden
- Leaf litter and plant debris removal
- Weed and sucker removal, each and every gardening session - garden raking also improves the overall appearance
- Deadhead *Antennaria* before it can cause brown-outs in the center of plants
- Remove any winter die-back on *Chilopsis*
- Regularly clean-up faded blooms on *Oenothera*
- Shrub care - deadhead lilac after bloom (highly encouraged, annual task); if needed, prune forsythia, quince, and mock orange (and other spring bloomers) to shape by early summer
- Deadhead after blooms have faded - *Coreopsis, Dianthus, Gaillardia, Iris, Kniphofia*, select *Penstemon, Sphaeralcea*, etc.

- Foothills restoration work - line trimming invasive species, raking up debris, checking on the health of desired forbs, shrubs, and native grasses in our foothill space
July and August are the hottest months in the garden and many of the firewise plants usually slow down. Many weeds however, will take advantage of hot weather and will need to be removed regularly.

**Garden tasks:**

- **Change irrigation** run-times to cycle/soak for longer and deeper watering; hand water additionally or occasionally run manual zones to reduce stress on plants during excessively high temperatures.

- **Weed and sucker removal** - common weeds at the homesite during this time of year include spotted spurge, field bindweed, and excess starts from naturalizing plants such as perennial *Geranium*.

- **Soap content**: *Saponaria ocymoides*, remove dried out foliage; *Yucca* spp., remove flower stalks with loppers, remove any brown leaf build-up, pull one leaf at a time and remove entire leaf up to the base.

- **Latex content**: *Euphorbia,* (maintenance can vary by species or cultivar) remove old flower stalks to the ground and prune to shape if needed, look up specific plant species for maintenance tips.

- **Deadhead after blooms have faded** - *Coreopsis, Gaillardia, Leucanthemum, Penstemon pinifolius, Penstemon venustus, Sedum groundcover, Sphaeralcea*, etc.

- **Cut back by at least half** (or to the ground) for a second flush of bloom - *Centranthus*, *Nepeta*.

- **Leaf litter and plant debris removal** - this seems to build-up during this time of year depending on plant species, weather conditions, and surrounding vegetation.

Resource Video: [https://youtu.be/0qhFMp1jBxQ](https://youtu.be/0qhFMp1jBxQ)
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September and October brings more ideal gardening weather and seasonal interest with fall color and loads of berries. Berries have a pectin content - great for firewise landscaping! Until we receive fall rain (typically in November), this is still fire season in Idaho.

Garden tasks:

- Reduce irrigation durations, a cycle/soak method may no longer be necessary - many plants will not tolerate ‘wet feet’ during cooler months and need to gradually harden off in order to prepare for winter; schedule an irrigation system blow-out for winterizing, usually completed in October

- Collect seed for drying/storage of any desired plant material (straight species encouraged more-so than ‘cultivars’ as hybridized traits may not be retained)

- Many weeds will slow down during this season so priority gardening tasks are **plant debris removal and perennial cutbacks**

- Perennial cutbacks, all the way to the ground could include: Centranthus, Coreopsis, Echinacea, Gaillardia, Geranium, Hemerocallis, Kniphofia, Leucanthemum, Oenothera, Saponaria x lempergii, Zauschneria, upright stonecrops, etc.; fall cutbacks are quite safe for the plants after the first hard frost

- Remove any lingering flower stalks but leave foliage to overwinter: Dianthus, Eriogonum, many Euphorbia, many Penstemon, Sedum groundcover, Sempervivum, Yucca

- Leave alone until late winter to early spring to offset possible winter damage: Agastache, Artemisia, Buddleia, Rosa, Scutellaria, most vining plants

- Fall fertilizer application to turf plots and sheep fescue
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**November/December**

The Idaho Firewise gardeners work at the homesite until snow flies. November is still a very busy month finishing up fall clean-up and other items on our list such as shrub removal in overgrown areas, etc.

**Garden tasks:**

- Plant spring **bulbs** as desired or needed - bulbs are competitors for spring moisture and compete with invasive re-seeding annual weeds such as cheatgrass and medusahead

- Finalized **fall clean-up as** much as possible - debris removal and general bed clean-up

- Now is a good time to look around the garden beds to see if there are any perennials that could still be cut back - one large perennial that could be cut back to the ground in November is *Baptisia*

- As leaves fall away, shrub and tree structure is easily viewed - most shrubs do best with late winter, spring, or early summer pruning (dependent on bloom time) in order to have the entire season to harden off any new growth; however, now is a good time to look at shrub or tree form... if there is anything obvious that could be pruned away that would improve the overall structure, now is a good time to make those decisions - e.g. *Acer, Celtis, Crataegus*

- Bring in all of your gardening tools, clean them as needed, drain hoses and place them inside

- November is generally the start of plant propagation for Idaho Firewise - covered seed trays are placed in a refrigerator for cold stratification, cuttings and divisions are planted in media and placed on a heat bench