

maintaining your yard & garden through winter weather



In the sunny South where weather never seems too severe, it can be easy to overlook seasonal maintenance that can prove critical to the life of our landscaping. Since we Southerners—particularly those of the Charleston variety—love to fuss over our yards and gardens (often competing with the neighbors for the coveted ‘Yard of the Month’ title), maintaining the beauty of our outdoor spaces teeters towards the top of our to-do lists. To help take the guesswork out maintaining your landscaping during the chilly winter weather, we’ve enlisted the expertise of three of the Lowcountry’s top lawn and garden professionals.

Weather-Proofing Wisdom #1

THE PRO *J.R. Kramer, ASLA, LEED AP*

THE COMPANY *Remark Studio LLC*

“As we move from fall into winter, a time when plants are going dormant and entering a rest period, there is still one last hoorah of perennial color and ornamental grasses in their full golden glory. This is the perfect time to begin making plans for any big changes you may want to make to your residential landscape; now is the time to consult a professional landscape architect regarding any renovations you would like to do to the overall design of your landscape. Hardscape elements such as walkways, patios, overhead structures, or water features can be installed now so they are ready to enjoy once spring arrives and this is also the perfect time to plant trees and shrubs or to relocate mature shrubs and trees. Planting now allows them the opportunity to acclimate to their new location before the growing season resumes in the spring.

Long term management of your landscape is important to protect your investment. Just as you provide routine maintenance of your home, you should also do the same for your landscape. The landscape is a living and ever changing organism, so management needs change as the landscape matures. Once the leaves have fallen, it’s a great time to carefully evaluate the form of trees and shrubs to determine if there is any selective trimming of branches that needs to be done. Pruning should always be done by hand and very carefully to ensure the form and health of the plant material

is maintained. Irrigation systems can be tested and repaired at this time and it may be possible to eliminate any unnecessary zones if the plant material is well established. This will help to conserve water use and reduce wasteful overwatering. Applying a thin layer of mulch to plant beds will give a fresh appearance and help to prevent cold season weeds from taking over. However, it is very important to remove any old layer of mulch before applying another layer to ensure the roots of trees and shrubs are not smothered. The ideal mulch

layer mimics the natural leaf litter found in the forest. Too often you find mounds of mulch piled onto the trunks of trees and shrubs, which is very unhealthy for the plants because it keeps moisture against the bark providing opportunities for decay and insect infestation. Less is more when it comes to mulching.

Lastly, enjoy the blooming flowers by planting asters, goldenrod, and swamp sunflower to name a few, either in beds or pots in your outdoor spaces. While the

lush season of spring and summer provide a feast for the eyes with green plants and vibrant colors, do not discount the beauty of the fall and winter season in your garden. The many colorful berries, interesting bark, and seed pods can be enjoyed with the cooler temperatures, while at the same time providing food for wildlife.”

For more information, call Remark Landscape Architecture at (843) 746-9573 or visit remarkstudiollc.com.

Weather-Proofing Wisdom #2

THE PROS *Patty Craven and Nick Popovich*

THE COMPANY *landscape design/build firm Designing Innovative Gardens (affectionately known as DIG)*

“Here at DIG, we relish the cooler weather of the fall and winter months. This is a time of enjoying what you may have created in your garden or be inspired to make some thoughtful changes. We both have strong feelings about what makes a garden successful, one that reflects the Lowcountry and that certain Charleston class. Our designs and subsequent installations seem to always encompass a few ‘must-haves’—don’t forget the basics, and the results are bound to be pleasing! So here are a few things that DIG can’t seem to leave out of the best Charleston gardens—things which often ensure the survival of these gardens during the cooler winter months.

1) Paths or connections. The ability to get around your garden is undervalued and needs to be planned from the start. Use interesting materials and make the journey fun!

2) Architecture. Integrate either an extension of the home’s features or bring in compatible pieces. Pergolas, a stone patio, or a bit of statuary gives the sense of permanence.



3) Maintain, and keep your eyes open.

Get on a fertilizer/insecticide program (we love those offered by Possum’s and John Deere) and look for potential problems and opportunities.

4) Native plants. Want to keep maintenance in check? Go native!

5) History. We’re blessed with the classic gardens of Downtown and the plantations; take photos and note what you see and like.

6) Texture. It’s not just color that enlivens a garden. Juxtaposed plant forms and leaf structure/color can do so much for everyone’s garden.

7) Planning. Plan before you dig or buy. The big box stores don’t have all the answers. Locally-grown plant materials are available within a short drive; visit local nurseries—they in themselves can be quite inspirational. Make every dollar count.

8) Water features, trellises, and planters. Do something different—a strategically placed planter of a large scale and bright color; the sound of water is hard to beat.

9) Know where to start. Know when to stop; sometimes ‘less is more’ in the garden. Our first step in a landscape renovation is the editing process. Learn what’s valuable,



what can and should be pruned, and what can be used as the foundation for your new landscape.

10) Embrace the seasons. We’re lucky to see the seasons change in our gardens. One can mark these times by utilizing as much evergreen material as possible splashed

with color. Something can and should always be blooming!”

For more information, call DIG at (843) 327-4372 or visit diglandscape.net.

Weather-Proofing Wisdom #3

THE PRO Ben Sumrell

THE COMPANY Sodbusters, Inc.

“Winter is upon us and there are a few things you can do to “winterize” your lawn. These tips apply to all warm season varieties of grass found in the Lowcountry, including Centipede, St. Augustine, Bermuda, and Zoysia. First, you should get a final application of an insecticide such as Sevin. This will act as a preventative measure for any outbreaks of insects during the occasional warmer winter days. Apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent winter weeds such as ‘poa annua’ or ‘annual bluegrass’ from germinating and becoming a problem in the spring when the weather really starts to warm up. Also, an application of 5-0-15 fer-

tilizer with slow release nitrogen will give the root system a boost to help your grass get through the cooler weather and thrive in the subsequent seasons.

It is also important to make sure all exposed pipes associated with your irrigation system are covered and winterized, including the backflow preventer that sits exposed beside your house. When mowing your lawn during these months, mow at a higher cutting height to eliminate stress from the cold. And finally, wait until after Easter when the grass has started to “green up” before applying any fertilizer in the spring. Wait until the last chance of frost has passed before applying nitrogen so the grass won’t be damaged by unexpected bouts of cold or frost.”

For more information, call Sodbusters at (843) 928-3996 or visit sodbustersinc.com.

