As I mowed my yard this weekend, I couldn't help but think about the jobs I needed to take care of in my lawn. There are several items that need to be taken care of now if they haven't been already. Here are some simple reminders and steps to help finish up some projects around the lawn before it gets any cooler.

Draining Water Lines

and Garden Hoses

Now is the time to clear out sprinkler lines and garden hoses before they freeze and burst. Empty garden hoses by stretching them out in a straight line before coiling them up. The water will run out when the hose is coiled over the arm or on hose stand. Store the coiled hose in a place where UV rays will not break down the hose material. A dark corner of a garage or shed is a good place to place these for the winter.

Sprinkler systems are set fairly shallow in the surface of the soil. While there is some protection from the weather, sprinkler lines can be damaged or burst the lines when the ground freezes for the winter. First, if there is a shut-off valve, close it off. Next, run the sprinkler system's zone to bleed off the lines. If the homeowner does not feel comfortable draining out the sprinkler system, contact a local professional to drain the system and blow out the lines.

Mulching Fall Leaves

Leaves are falling in earnest now, and it has been fun to watch children play in area yards.

Outside of the fun, what do we do with all the leaves on the lawn? Collecting, bagging and removing leaves can be a very time consuming process that is ongoing throughout the late fall. The wind also has an uncanny ability to blow the neighbor's leaves into your yard too! Instead of spending all that time and energy removing leaves, why not compost them with the help of the mower?

First, check the mower blades to make sure they are sharp to help shred the leaves as fine as possible. Second, mow over the leaves when they are dry to help increase the ability to shred. Third, mow the lawn at its regular height three or four passes slowly to shred the leaves as fine as possible so they fall into the lawn, and not cover the turf. Turfgrass will still need to have access to sunlight to continue photosynthesis, and store carbohydrates to build a strong root system. The mulching process will probably need to be repeated to keep the lawn from being covered with leaves for the duration of the fall.

Final Lawn Fertilization

Cool season lawn turf such as bluegrass and fescue can be fertilized one last time before spring. This last fertilization will help boost the photosynthesis rate of the turf, and build carbohydrate reserves in the plant to help lawns green up in the spring. Late fertilization can also help increase the lawn's winter hardiness, root growth and desirable, moderate shoot growth in the spring.

Apply 1/2 to 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet of area to the lawn. Remember to look on the fertilizer label to ensure than at least a full pound of nitrogen is applied, not a pound of total fertilizer. Soluble fertilizers that contain urea or ammonium sulfate are desired in this application to help ensure that turf is receiving the nitrogen it needs as soon as possible. Avoid using slow-release, or water insoluble fertilizer.

If you have any questions about lawn winterizing tips , please contact me at dlott2@unl.edu, by calling (308) 532-2683, or by contact your local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Office. Have a great week!