



Seven Garden Maintenance Tips

We've never yet heard a bird, bee or butterfly mutter "I wish they'd tidy up this place." Many insects require leaf litter, birds nip seed from dried seed heads, and some butterfly life stages look like garden debris.

Pictured here is the Black Swallowtail pupa

as it overwinters in a garden.

Tidying up is a balancing act between aesthetics and habitat. The first step is allowing plants to re-seed throughout the bed, creating a living tapestry and eliminating the need to mulch around every perennial.

The second step: give up control: the plants will tell you where they want to be. Each season plants will shift in response to the weather and soil. Follow their lead, tidy up after them as you need, fill gaps with new plants, and sit back and enjoy the show.

Here are 7 tips to help guide you in your garden maintenance.

1. *Learn what the native seedlings look like so you don't unwittingly weed them out.*
 2. *Leave dried seed heads on the plants during fall and winter. The birds will eat them, and the seed will disperse and replenish your garden.*
 3. *Let leaf litter lay. It enriches the soil, provides habitat for overwintering insects, and encourages beneficial fungi and mycorrhiza. Let at least some dormant perennials stems remain upright: the hollow stems provide insect habitat.*
 4. *Trim back perennials and gently rake out excess leaf litter in spring. If you see delicate seedlings popping their heads up, return the leaf-blanket to these tender seedlings as they gradually end their long winter nap.*
 6. *Don't use a pre-emergent herbicide to keep weeds at bay – it will keep your native plants from spreading by seed.*
 7. *Pull weeds as soon as you recognize them. If you're not sure, let it grow. It will make itself clear in time. Once it blooms, you'll know. Yank weeds before they set seed.*
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Coneflowers and many other natives create visual interest in the garden long past their 'prime' and continue to provide food and nectar for birds, butterflies and insects.

Edge of the Woods Native Plant Nursery is a women-owned, independent business.

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