

Putting Your Garden to Bed

Fall officially begins with the autumnal equinox in late September. During this time of year, the garden becomes a place for harvest as plant growth slows with the decreasing daylight and temperature.

Here are some ideas to help tidy up your home or community garden space for the season – then it's time to rest and enjoy the fruits and vegetables of your labour!

Make the bed -> clean up the plants and add fertilizers and compost

- Cut back finished perennials and remove spent vegetable and annual plants to the compost pile. Pruning is not usually advised during fall, but removal of dead, diseased or damaged branches can be done at any time.

- Improve your soil by adding fertilizers and compost. Testing your soil will show how much nutrient is available to plants, focusing on the primary nutrients Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), and Potassium (K). Organic nutrients in the form of kelp meal, bone meal, blood meal, and compost are released slowly over time. The addition of organic matter through compost stimulates microbes and other beneficial organisms. Work in materials by loosening the soil with a garden fork and mixing to a depth of 3" - 6".

- Adjust the acidity of your soil. Acidity is measured on the pH scale, where 1 is the most acidic, 7 is neutral, and 14 is the most alkaline. Most vegetables thrive in slightly acidic soils in the range of 5.5 to 6.5. It's best to change soil pH slowly, and you should always do a soil test to determine the pH level before taking corrective measures. Alkaline substances such as lime raises the pH and acidifying materials (pine needles, peat moss) lower the pH.

Tuck the plants in -> finish the season with a last round of planting

Fall is a great time to plant many types of trees and shrubs. Plants can take advantage of the warmed soil and start root growth until the ground freezes. In early spring, these plants begin new growth and become established at a faster rate.

The vegetable season can be extended into the late fall with use of greenhouses or floating row cover to provide frost protection. Vegetables such as kale, cabbage, parsnip improve with cooler temperatures. It's also the time of year to plant garlic!

Get under the covers -> use mulch to protect your soil

Mulches are materials used to cover the soil in your garden bed. Putting down a layer (about 2" thick) of mulch helps prevent erosion while improving moisture conservation and weed suppression. Mulching is like an insulation for your garden to even out the freezing & thawing cycles of winter. If you use a heavy mulch it can be removed in the spring to help the ground warm up faster. The most common mulch used in perennial gardens is wood chip or shredded bark. For vegetable beds, a lighter less fibrous mulch of straw, spoiled hay, grass clippings, or shredded leaves is preferred.

Sweet Dreams -> plan for next year

Organize your tools, pots, and other gardening supplies – this makes spring startup a snap! Compile any notes and photos you may have & use the bareness of fall to plan landscaping and building projects. Enjoy the inspiration of seed catalogues and resource books to get you recharged and looking forward to another great year of gardening!



Common Ground promotes environmentally and economically sustainable agriculture and community development.

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