

Putting the Garden to Bed: Managing the Fall Garden

Preparing Your Vegetable Garden for Winter

You can postpone the inevitable (that is, winter) for a while by covering your vegetables with old sheets or bedspreads on cold nights, but the declining light and chilly daytime temperatures will naturally bring plant growth to a halt. Leave carrots, garlic, horseradish, leeks, parsnips, radishes, and turnips in the garden for harvesting through early winter.

- Pull up tomato, squash, pea, and bean plants. If they're disease-free, compost them. If any are diseased, either burn them or discard separately. Pull up and put away the stakes.
- Before the ground gets too hard, remove all weeds and debris and eliminate overwintering sites for insects and disease.
- Gently till the soil to expose any insects who plan to overwinter; this will reduce pest troubles in the spring and your garden site will be ready come spring!
- Once most of the garden soil is exposed, add a layer of compost, leaves, manure (if you have it), and lime (if you need it). Gently till into the soil.
- Another option is to sow cover crops such as winter rye to improve your soil and reduce weeds.
- If some areas have hopelessly gone to weeds, cover them with black plastic and leave it in place over the winter and into the spring to kill sprouting seeds.



Preparing Herbs for the Winter

- Sage is a perennial in most areas and does not need special treatment for the winter. Before frost stops its growth, cut a branch or two to dry and use in stuffing at Thanksgiving!
- Rosemary is a tender evergreen perennial that should be sheltered outside (Zone 6) or potted up and brought inside (Zone 5 and colder) for the winter.
- Thyme is fairly indestructible. A perennial, it will go dormant in the fall, then revive by itself in the spring.
- Parsley, a biennial, will withstand a light frost. In Zone 5 or colder, cover it on cold nights. It has a long taproot and does not transplant well.
- Chives are hardy perennials. Dig up a clump and pot it, then let the foliage die down and freeze for several weeks. Bring the pot indoors to a sunny, cool spot. Water well and harvest chives throughout the winter.

Preparing Berry Patches for the Winter

- In early to mid-fall, prune summer-bearing raspberries, leaving six of the strongest brown canes for every 1 foot of your row.
- Prune fall-bearing raspberries ruthlessly, moving them to the ground after they have borne fruit. New canes will come up in the spring.
- Plant blackberries in the fall and mound up the soil around the canes to prevent hard frosts from heaving them out of the ground.
- Cover strawberry beds with straw or hay.

Tips for Fall Cleanup in Your Garden

- Empty all your outdoor containers to keep them from cracking during the winter. Store them upside down.
- Hang a bucket over a hook in your toolshed or garage and use it to store hose nozzles and sprinkler attachments.
- On a mild day, run your garden hose up over a railing or over the shed to remove all the water. Then roll it up and put it away.
- Mow your lawn as late into the fall as the grass grows. Grass left too long when deep snow arrives can develop brown patches in the spring.
- Don't leave fallen leaves on the lawn. Rake onto a large sheet or tarp, then drag to your compost pile in thin layers mixed with old hay and other material. Or, rake the leaves into loose piles and run the mower over them to turn them into mulch for perennial and bulb beds.
- Cover your compost pile with plastic or a thick layer of straw before snow falls.
- Drain the fuel tank on your lawn mower or any other power equipment. Consult the owner's manual for other winter maintenance.
- Scrub down and put away your tools. Some folks oil their tools with vegetable oil to avoid rust.

We hope these tips are helpful!

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