



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Master Gardener Jim Willis walks around his backyard garden talking about end-of-season gardening chores and picking ripe fruit and vegetables.

MASTER GARDENER SHARES TIPS FOR WINTER PREP

It's time to put your garden, and tools, to bed properly for winter

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

As fall weather brings an end to this year's growing season, Master Gardener Jim Willis, of Pendleton, says now is the time to start looking ahead and planning for next spring.

Gardeners should take steps to keep both their tools and their soil in top condition, Willis said. That includes composting, testing composition and texture of soils and applying light oils to hand tools to keep them from rusting.

One of the first things Willis does every fall is take a photo or drawing of what he's grown in his garden over the summer, so he can be sure to rotate his vegetables next year. Rotating crops helps to break up diseases in the soil and allow the plants to draw on different nutrients.

"You don't want to put the same thing in," Willis said.

Willis grows a wide variety of vegetables in his own garden, including tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, carrots, beets, radishes, bell peppers and hot peppers. He also harvests bags filled with leaves from his yard along the Umatilla River, which he will leave open on the ground in order to lure in worms and provide them food and protection.

These "worm islands," as Willis calls them, are a rich source of carbon, and the worm castings — i.e. poop — provide some of the richest natural fertilizer available.

"If you want to have good soil, you want to have worms in it," Willis said.

Gardeners can also mow in leaves about 3-5 inches deep into their soil, Willis said, along with additional compost to help plants thrive. Good soil, according to Willis' research, breaks down to roughly 45 percent minerals, 25 percent water, 25 percent air and 5 percent organic material. Compost is key to helping crops get the nutrients and microbial support they need.

As for soil structure, Willis recommends a simple test. First, fill a jar about halfway with soil from the yard or garden, add water until the jar is nearly full, give it a shake and let it rest overnight. The soil will

separate into three layers, with sand at the bottom, silt at the middle and clay at the top.

"It's important to have all three types of those elements in your soil," he said.

Willis said gardeners should keep an eye on whether the soil is too loose and sandy, or too dense and full of clay. From there, they can make any adjustments before re-planting later in the spring.

"(The jar test) doesn't cost you a cent, and it gives you an idea of what you need to do in your garden," Willis said.

Around this time, Willis said he starts getting busy cleaning plants out of the garden that won't survive through the first frost. His carrots, however, are frost tolerant, and he will overwinter those by shielding them with soil, compost and a cover layer of leaves.

For his hand tools, Willis recommends linseed oil on any wooden handles to keep them strong, and light oil to keep the metal heads from rusting.

Willis, 75, has been gardening his whole life and been a master gardener for eight years. He said putting the garden to bed can be labor intensive, but well worth the effort.

"Gardening is a joy," he said with a smile. "It's not work. It's happiness."

Money going up chimney? How to make your fireplace more efficient

By StatePoint

Nothing beats gathering around the fire in winter. Unfortunately, a wood-burning fireplace could be a major source of energy loss in your home, sending your utility bills sky high.

However, you don't need to sacrifice the fire to improve your home's energy efficiency and reduce your heating bills; in fact, it's possible to convert your wood fireplace into an efficient heat source with the following tips.

Upgrade Your Fireplace

Consider a gas fireplace insert. They generate more radiant heat and are cleaner to maintain than traditional masonry style wood-burning fireplaces, which are a leading source of indoor air loss.

"Traditional wood fireplaces add a lot of charm to a home, but they are inefficient -- even when they aren't in use," says Andy Tesch, brand director of Heat & Glo, the leading manufacturer of innovative gas fireplaces, stoves and inserts. "A gas fireplace insert is a great alternative to maintain the ambiance a fire creates while enhancing efficiency."

A gas fireplace insert is cleaner, too, creating no ash, soot, or smoke. Models like the Escape from Heat & Glo use energy-saving FireBrick technology to increase efficiency and are low maintenance, turning on and off with the flip of a switch. Learn more about the benefits of a gas fireplace insert at heatnglo.com/insertawareness.

If you can't part with the aroma, crackle and act of building a real fire, consider pellet

and EPA-certified wood inserts, which can be an easy, clean and efficient alternative as well.

Best Practices

If making the upgrade to an insert is not possible, a few simple steps can drastically improve the energy efficiency of your fireplace. Number one, when the fireplace is not in use, close the chimney damper. You'll prevent warm air and your money from going up and out the chimney. A flue sealer is an affordable, inflatable stopper that fits be-

low the damper to further seal off the chimney and is a worthwhile purchase.

Proper maintenance can also go far to improve your fireplace's efficiency. Have it inspected, maintained and cleaned annually. Even if you love DIY, you may want to hire a contractor to ensure the job is done safely and thoroughly.

Considering adding doors or a cover to the front of your fireplace to help reduce the draft and improve the look. There are many styles available to enhance your interior design.

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