Preparing for Fall

The season for summer vegetables is now over. The season for fall cool crops are to start. These may be as simple as cover crops or as complicated as covered greenhouse crops. But either way the area of garden needs to be made clean for the next year.

After the crops have run their course, the freezer is full and neighbors have shared in the harvest, comes the cleanup stage. All old vegetable vines, stalks, and stems need to be taken out of the garden. If you have not had any pest or disease in the plants these can go on the compost pile. Burning is a good way to get rid of diseased and infested remains. Clear all weeds and trim around the garden. Keeping the grass low will keep the squash bugs and others from wintering over in the over growth.

Turning the garden soil deep with a plow, spade or potato fork will bring up larva of different insects and make them available to the birds to eat. Doing this almost every one to two months will keep the soil open to the rain and keep the insect larva from wintering over. This will also keep the weeds and grass from establishing themselves. If you use cover crops, turning after cleaning, then seed the cover crops. Frost will come and the cover crop will die so you turn the crop under. This will add nutrients to the soil.

Amending the garden with peat moss, compost or bought soil can be turned under too. Turning the soil of the garden is like compost it helps to break down the organic material added and enables the soil to take up water. The heat produced will kill disease and will promote the earth worm population.

So keep the area clean of grass and weeds. Turn the soil to promote catching water. Seed your cover crop. Turn your cover crop over and then amend your soil according to your soil test. You will be ready for next spring! Have a nice winter and enjoy all the Holidays and eating your harvest.
In the Garden: Covering up for Winter

As the days become shorter and the nights become cooler, we are pulling out the lighter jackets and hoodies in preparation for seasonal changes. Similar preparations need to be considered for our vegetable gardens as well. While some of us are content to dust off our hands and walk away from the garden plot with a sigh of relief, it is best to consider what winter has in store for our precious soil. To maximize the promise of produce it will bear in the spring to come, there are a few things we can do today, before our gardens bed down for a “long winter’s nap.”

One of the most important gardening maxims to remember is: The soil likes a cover. Look around and one can see that, left to its own devices, the ground is typically covered with something: leaves, grass, weeds, rocks. And this is a good thing because uncovered soil blows away in the wind or washes away in the rain. In order to protect the soil in the garden and increase its nutrient density, intentionally choosing a cover for the soil is very important. Of course, one can choose to just let the weeds take over and till them in come springtime; however, this only increases the likelihood of more weeds to come and does not necessarily maximize nutritional benefits.

One of the easiest covers to come by, especially this time of year, is leaves. For gardeners who are raking up leaves anyway, spreading them in the garden is not much extra work. Straw is another mulch-like cover that works as well. According to Mother Earth Living Magazine [Oct ‘14] both of these options maintain a degree of fluffiness which improves decomposition over the winter, “adding nutrients, organic matter, and worm-rich humus.”

However, one of the best ways to improve soil health and prevent soil erosion involves growing cover crops. There are many types of crops to choose from, and the ideal crop depends upon what was grown this year, and what is planned for the garden in spring. Different crops produce different results in the soil, although all of them prevent soil erosion. If one has grown a lot of corn in the garden, it is good to follow the corn with a crop of peas or clover which fix nitrogen from the air into the soil. This is beneficial because corn is a heavy feeder that requires a lot of nitrogen. This way, the gardener is protecting the soil and improving it all at the same time.

Other fall cover crops to consider are winter wheat, winter rye, and barley. Rye and barley emit a kind of natural herbicide discouraging the growth of weeds. Barley in particular is good because its roots can break up clay soils, it does not reseed, and it can easily be tilled in with a hoe. Barley can also be planted in spring. Winter wheat and barley can be used as mulch and provide a great cover in which to grow cantaloupes, pumpkins, butternut squash, or other ground covering vines. I frequently plant barley in spring, press it down after it dies off, and plant my vines right through it. This minimizes weeds and keeps the fruit off of the ground.

According to Territorial Seed Co. and Progressive Farmer Magazine [Oct ‘14] daikon radish is a fall cover crop that can act like a drill in the soil breaking up heavy clay soils, aerating the soil, and adding decaying matter as the roots deteriorate over winter.

Another cover crop that has a variety of benefits is buckwheat. While it is primarily a warm weather crop, it can be sown in late summer if the temperatures are warm enough and there is enough moisture for germination. Buckwheat fixes phosphorus making it an excellent crop to follow root bearing produce like potatoes, sweet potatoes, and beets. Additionally, buckwheat flowers attract beneficial insects. Buckwheat does reseed, so the gardener can gather seed for the next crop or let it drop on the ground and till in the following crop before it reseeds. For those who are really industrious, the seeds can be ground into a gluten-free flour—think buckwheat pancakes!

It can seem so difficult to thinking of purchasing seed and planting a crop when there are so many other seasonal preparations to consider. However, those whose take the time to do so will be protecting a valuable asset that will reap many benefits in the seasons to come.
Favorite Seeds List

Every Garden Spot is different. Plants that produce in one area, may not grow and produce in another. A soil test to determine the soil nutrients will give the gardener a head start on what is needed to produce good vegetables. The list below are vegetables that are easy to start from seeds, in early spring to be transplanted in the garden, after the frost date April 21st.

**Broccoli**
- Bay meadow
- Packman
- Gypsy
- Premium
- Comet
- Sun King

**Tomatoes**
- Skyway (Hybrid)
- Charger (Hybrid)
- Peron
- Legend
- Celebrity (Hybrid)

**Heirloom**
- Brandy wine
- Mortgage Lifter
- Arkansas Traveler

**Bell Peppers**
- King of North
- Keystone
- King Arthur
- Red Knight

The Next List can be planted in the garden after the frost date usually around April 21st.

**Early Spring**
- **Burpee**
  - Lettuce Leaf
  - Giant Caesar
  - Black seeded Simpson
  - Mesclun

- **Johnny**
  - Spinach Hybrid
  - Kooka Burra F1

**After Frost Date**
- **Squash (Summer)**
  - Zucchini type
  - (Green) Dunja F1 OG
  - (Yellow) Golden Glory F1
  - (Yellow) Tigress F1 RTD
  - (Green) Fordhook
  - (Green) Noche F1
  - (Yellow) Butter Stick

**May**
- **Corn Bicolor**
  - Johnny’s Hybrid Bicolor (Sh2)
  - SS2742 F1 TRTD
  - Wxtra Tender 2171 TRTD
  - Hybrid Bicolor SH2

- **Beans**
  - Velour Bush
  - Pole-
  - Kentucky Wonder
  - Blue Lake
  - Rattle Snake

Warm Soil Approximately 70-80 degrees

**Okra**
- Clemson Spineless

So Experiment with different seeds and find the ones that thrive in your garden.
MASTER GARDENER CLUB OFFICERS

President-Sharon Joslin

WELCOME TO MEMBERS

Marilee Bachmann
Andie Hession
Lacy Cornell
David and Laura Timby
Laura Clark
Edna Mae Wells
Suzie McCormick
Gary Welchman

You are invited to be a guest at one of our Master Gardener meetings at the Searcy County Extension Office on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 10 a.m.