



Fall Vegetable Garden Activities

Vegetable gardens need some special attention in the fall. Finish harvesting frost-sensitive vegetables before the first frost or extend their harvest by covering plants on nights when frost is predicted.

Many vegetables are hardy and will live right in your garden all winter long, where they can serve as a continual source of fresh produce or, protected under mulch cover, provide the first spring harvests.

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| Carrots | Cover with 6-8 inches of organic mulch (hay, straw, leaves, pine needles) after first heavy frosts. Mark the row so you can dig carrots during winter and find them in spring before new top growth starts. |
| Beets | Treat like carrots. |
| Brussels sprouts | Leave in place. Flavor improves after frost. Sprouts of hardiest varieties can be harvested through many weeks of freezing weather. |
| Horseradish | Leave in place. No mulch needed. |
| Kale | Leave in place; enjoy many weeks of harvest through fall into winter. |
| Late-seeded onions | Mulch heavily with organic materials; remove mulch in early spring. |
| Leaf lettuce, spinach, other hardy greens | Cover late-planted seedlings with layer of thick organic mulch; remove in early spring. |
| Parsley | Mulch with hay, leaves or pine needles after light frost. |
| Parsnips, salsify | Treat like carrots. |

In mid-October plant garlic for harvest next summer. Prepare soil with a top-dressing of compost and a complete fertilizer, then plant individual cloves of seed garlic about two inches deep and four inches apart. Cover the planting bed with three or four inches of chopped leaves, mulch hay or pine needles, and watch the tiny green shoots emerge in early spring.

Elsewhere in the garden, clean up all debris, weeds, stalks and plant parts left over after harvest. Discard residues from all diseased plants; compost the rest or rototill them directly into the soil. Then fertilize and plant a winter cover crop such as winter rye or spring oats.

If you plan on using raw animal manures to help condition and fertilize your garden soil, either compost the manure first or till it into the soil just prior to planting the fall cover crop. Several months of soil activity will kill any pathogenic organisms present in the raw manure.

Sow a cover, or “green manure,” crop as soon as a crop is cleaned up and space is available. Cover crops reduce soil erosion, prevent nutrient losses, help suppress weeds and add organic matter to the soil. They keep the garden looking neat, help insulate the soil and encourage continued beneficial earthworm and soil microorganism activity.

Winter rye or spring oats both make good fall cover crops. Sow 2 1/2 lbs of oats, or 3-5 lbs of winter rye per 1000 sq. ft. Scatter the seeds evenly over freshly cultivated soil, then till gently or rake the soil so that the seeds are lightly covered.

Planted in late August or early September, spring oats will provide excellent winter protective cover and will not grow back in the spring. Spring oats residues are easily incorporated into the soil with light tillage equipment.

Plant winter rye from late summer through October 1. It will establish quickly, grow vigorously and begin growing again in early spring. Rototill the ryegrass as soon as the soil is dry enough to work and begin planting three weeks later.

In late fall clean your garden tools, oil them to prevent rust and store them for winter. Don't forget to drain that garden hose! Consult the manufacturer's directions on winterizing power equipment.

Store leftover pesticides in their original containers and lock them up in a dry place. Prevent liquid products from freezing. Before disposing of small amounts of leftover garden pesticides or empty containers, consult the label for special precautions. **Remember - the label is the law.** Do not forget to wash out and dry your sprayer before hanging it up for the winter. A light coating of oil will help protect any moving parts.

*revised 5/00 from an original fact sheet by Ted Flanagan, Garden Specialist,
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