



Putting the Garden to Bed

Fall is a season of dramatic contrasts; transitioning from the exuberance of giant zucchinis, that seem to escape our notice despite our careful searching, tomatoes that always ripen all at once and overwhelm our processing abilities, and days that can show 30 degrees or more of temperature swings between morning and evening. With decreasing hours of daylight, plants take longer to mature, typical diseases such as 'powdery mildew' overtake squash, pumpkins and cucumbers and we begin to embrace the garden rhythms that promote a time of rest. Fall is a time for gardeners to contemplate, plan, preserve the harvest, prepare soil and celebrate small steps along the life path of learning.

Spend time, while the last crops are still in place, walking around the garden and:

Make a Map

- Note where everything was planted, including quantities of plants used, noting varieties that did well, which insects and/or diseases were challenging.
- Also take note of succession plantings: which early season crops were replaced with heat-loving crops, dates of harvest, mulches used, etc.

Plan for Crop Rotation

- In this basic tenet of organic gardening, vegetables in the same 'family' are grown in a different location in the garden each year to prevent the build-up of soil diseases and insect problems. It is especially important to practice a 2-3 year crop rotation for members of the Solanaceae family (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and eggplants).

Clean up all Garden Beds

- Dig up all annual crops and dispose of disease and/or insect infested varieties (DO NOT utilize them in the compost pile). Crops that are left standing in the garden become overwintering sites for pest insects.
- Make sure the perimeters and aisles surrounding garden areas are weed-free.

Dig the Soil in all Garden Beds

- Turn the soil, dig in chopped up leaves (try mowing them so they won't mat down), and add ½" of compost as you turn the soil.

Plant Cover Crops

- By the end of September, or first week in October, plant winter rye and hairy vetch, raking the seeds lightly into the soil, tamping them down with a hoe, covering with a layer of weed-free straw or chopped leaves and watering well.

Start or Update Your Compost Pile

- All end-of-season garden material that is free of insects and/or disease can be chopped into 1-2" pieces and incorporated into the compost pile.

Clean and Store all Garden Tools

- Scrub all tools to remove soil & dry well
- Use a wire brush or sandpaper to remove rust
- Use a light layer of vegetable oil to prevent new rust

Remove all Garden Structures and Amendment Materials

- All tomato fences, cages and secondary support structures must be removed from community garden plots
- Leaves may be mown or chopped, dug into the soil or spread on top as a light mulch. Bags of leaves are not permitted to be stored within community garden plots

Order Garden Catalogs

- Begin the process of dreaming and planning for spring by ordering garden catalogs
- Check the DUG website prior to January to gain information about the upcoming Grow a Garden program

Celebrate Each New Thing You've Learned

- Share your wisdom with friends, giving back more than you reap. The best gardeners are like a rich compost pile – embracing communities and growing slowly with the season.