

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Thiessen October 6th, 2023

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Cleaning Up Your Garden in the Fall

After a long, hot, and dry gardening season, it might be tempting to walk away from your garden and not look back until spring. However, doing a few extra chores this month can actually set you up for success for the next gardening season. Here are a few tips on how to clean your vegetable garden up in the fall:

Tender vegetables such as tomatoes, beans, squash, and peppers will need to be picked before we receive a frost. You can bring in your green tomatoes as well. Green tomatoes that are full-sized and have a white, star-shaped section on the bottom of the fruit have reached the “mature green stage”. They can be harvested and placed in a paper bag to continue ripening. Store ripe tomatoes on cardboard trays with newspaper between layers if stacked. If possible, keep the temperature close to 55 degrees F. Check periodically for rotting and remove tomatoes as needed. Hardier vegetables are okay with frosts it’s when we receive a hard freeze that these vegetables need to be harvested. These are veggies such as carrots, beets, lettuce, and spinach. Sometimes these vegetables can even overwinter and start producing again next spring!

The most important step for garden clean-up is to eliminate debris. This will help to get rid of diseases and insects that can over winter and cause problems next year. You also want to pull any weeds that might be left. If they go ignored you will have many more problems next year as they can drop seeds. If your garden plants were heavily infected with insects or disease, it is best to completely remove and discard of those plants. The other option would be to pull up the plants and let them dry for a few days, then come back with a mower to shred the plant material, as smaller pieces will break down quicker. This material is rich in organic matter and can be added back into your soil. Once the plants are shredded you can rototill them into the soil and allow them to decompose over the winter. This should help to improve your soil structure for next season. You can also do this with fall leaves or other plant debris you might have in your landscape.

There are many benefits to working your garden soil in the fall. It’s a great time to take a soil test so you can add compost or organic matter now to break down over the winter. A soil test will also help you with your fertilizer needs during the growing season. The other nice thing

about tilling the soil in the fall is that we don't have to do a fine till. In fact, we want to leave it rough with some clods. Then, in our Kansas winter, the snow, rain, and freezing and thawing will break down the soil. Then, next spring, all we have to do is give it a light raking, and we'll be ready to plant.

There are also many other fall chores that can be done this time of year! You can divide flowering perennial plants to keep your flower beds from becoming over crowded. This also helps to invigorate older plants that might not be flowering like they used to. October through November is a great time to plant spring flowering bulbs. These are plants such as tulips, daffodils, and crocus. These bulbs need a cold period before they bloom in the spring. They often look best planted in masses in the landscape.

Spending a bit of extra time now in your garden will get you off to a great start in spring. Getting your garden plot cleaned and some spring bulbs planted will make you a happy gardener when spring rolls around! If you have any questions, please call your local Extension office.

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