

Gardening Basics

LESSON 10:

PUTTING YOUR GARDEN TO BED

Cover Cropping

Cover Cropping refers to planting certain fast growing types of crops in your garden either between harvests, or overwinter, to help build soil health while your garden rests.

- Cover cropping keeps your soil covered in organic matter, which improves soil structure, prevents erosion, improves water holding capacity, and helps to control weeds
- In the Spring, work the cover crops back into your soil to provide a 'green manure' – adding nutrients and organic matter directly into your garden bed
- Common cover crops used: Buckwheat, Fall Rye, Vetch, Clover, Beans, Peas, Oats, Winter Wheat

Keep in mind timing – most crops need temperatures above 7 degrees Celsius to germinate properly.



Winter Crops

- Some plants will overwinter in your garden! Kale especially will keep growing throughout the colder months. Many plants, like brussels sprouts, are best harvested after a frost
- Many root vegetables do well when left in the ground over the winter. Things like carrots, beets, and potatoes can be left in the soil – provided it is not water logged and has good drainage, and will keep better than if stored inside
- There are many crops that will grow in the winter with the help of something like a cold frame or a row cover to help keep them warm – things like lettuce, spinach, and scallions are all good options and can be sewn until the end of September

Fall is the time to plant garlic! Garlic can be planted from mid-September, until the soil is still workable, with the best time to plant being October. Plant cloves with the skin intact about 2-3" deep into loose, loamy soil. Cover with a light mulch to protect the cloves and prevent soil erosion. Harvest in July of the following year.



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Mulches

- Mulching plants over the winter provides some additional benefits to mulching at other times of the year
- Mulching at any time of the year is extremely beneficial – it reduces erosion, helps control weeds, and when using an organic mulch, adds organic material to your bed
- Mulching further over the winter helps to insulate plants against cold weather, and helps to prevent major fluctuations in temperature which can be damaging to plants, and impact their period of dormancy
- When choosing a mulch material for your winter garden, look at choosing one that will help to trap air and insulate, such as shredded leaves or straw
- Pay attention to the type of leaves used when mulching with leaf mulch – not all leaves break down the same way, and some can hinder the decomposition process, rather than help it!



Image source: <https://www.hobbyfarms.com/winter-crops-grow-sell-kale-lettuce-brussels-sprouts/>

Row Covers: investing in row covers is a great way to prolong your garden harvest into the winter months, and keep new seedlings protected as they develop throughout the fall!