

November Gardening Thoughts By Earl Hockin, Master Gardener

Now is the time for a new planting season! Go to the USDA website at <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> and click on the circular symbol in the upper left. This allows the site to determine your location, and you will be able to see the exact plant hardiness zone for your location.

Unless you are at a high elevation you are located in zone 7a or 7b. This means you can be planting hardy cool season vegetables, garlic and onions, spring blooming bulbs such as daffodils, annuals such as pansies, and perennials such as snapdragons. Or consider herbs such as chives, cilantro and arugula. You can also plant blueberries, blackberries and grapes. If you are growing your vegetables in raised bed gardens, the soil will be warmer than the ground-level soil.

The soil will remain warmer even longer if you have low tunnel row covered beds. Using lightweight row cover will protect cool season vegetables and herbs from frost down to 28F, and yet let in sufficient light and rainfall to enable growth. You will be able to harvest these vegetables and herbs in late winter and/or early spring months.

During the first couple of weeks of November, you can direct sow seeds of leafy greens such as arugula, kale, spinach and lettuce. Varieties of spinach that are particularly cold tolerant are Bloomsdale, Giant Winter and Olympia. Cold hardy lettuce varieties include Black-seeded Simpson, Oakleaf, Buttercrunch, Red Romaine, Winter Density and Red Iceberg. This is also the time to sow seeds of root vegetables such as carrots, beets, turnips, parsnips and radishes. These vegetables actually sweeten with frost. Vegetables such as kohlrabi broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and Brussel sprouts should be transplanted in early November. They prefer warmer temperatures for seed germination but once germinated, they do well. They will grow in the coolness of fall and through winter, especially when protected with low tunnels of row cover.

Broccoli leaves can handle temperature down to 15F but the heads are more tender and need to be harvested if the temperature is below 25F. Cabbage can survive down to 20F. If damaged by frost, peel off the damaged outer leaves before storing or eating. Kohlrabi survives down to 20F, collards and kale down to 12F, Swiss chard and arugula down to 22F, and cilantro down to 15F. Winter hardy lettuce varieties will survive to 15F and lower with red lettuces being the best for cold weather. All of these vegetables will stop growing when daylight is less than 10 hours but begin growing again in late January when the daylight increases beyond 10 hours. Therefore, you can begin harvesting some of them as early as mid-February.

Fall is the best time to test your soil for nutrients and then add required nutrients if needed. It is also the best time to add compost as it will feed the microorganisms that keep the soil healthy. One means of testing your garden soil is to collect samples and submit to the University of Tennessee. The website for instructions and submission is listed below.

Clean and sharpen your gardening tools before storing for winter. Set up a simple tool cleaning station in your yard. All you need is a bucket of sand and a bottle of oil to do most of the work for you. Use a small storage bin or pail filled with clean sand, fine or coarse.

Using a putty knife or plastic scraper, scrape off as much dirt as possible then use a blast of hose water to finish. Dry with a towel so there is no chance of rust developing. Next, apply a few drops of mineral oil or vegetable oil and wipe with a clean rag to get rid of sap or insect residue. Any rusty spots should be covered with some oil and then rubbed with steel wool. Wooden handles can be treated with boiled linseed oil. Leave on for 10 minutes then wipe the handle with a clean towel until it feels dry. Sterilize the tools with rubbing alcohol. Mix enough mineral or vegetable oil into the sand filled bucket so it is moist. Store your tools in the bucket whenever you have finished using them.

Resources

“Getting the Most Out of Your Home Vegetable Garden Soil Test Report – W 804-A,”
<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W804-A.pdf>

“Getting the Most Out of Your Raised Bed or Potting Mix Test Report – W 804-B,”
<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W804-B.pdf>

“Lawn and Garden Soil Samples,”
<https://soillab.tennessee.edu/soil-testing/lawn-and-garden-soil-samples/>

“The Tennessee Vegetable Garden - Building and Using Raised Beds – W 346-E,”
<https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W346-E.pdf>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT’s YouTube site for helpful videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IklH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

Or Washington County’s YouTube site:
<https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.