

A Restful Season



The snow blankets my garden beds, and I peer out longingly at them each morning. The frozen ground is no longer fit to be dug, and most of the straggler plants have wilted away. Each year I have grand plans to build cold frames and harvest through the winter. I tried it once in my previous garden, but the area was too shaded to sustain life in the [winter](#). I intend to go through with the task at some point but, for now, I'm content with having a winter break.

I miss the garden, yet I'm thankful for the respite. I spend my winters pouring time into other hobbies; reading, in particular. A moment away from the plants and weeds helps keep me on my toes in the spring. I imagine that if I gardened twelve months of the year, I'd get sick of it. I enjoy the time off. It allows me to reflect on the season now behind me. What went wrong? What was successful? Is there something I forgot to plant? Is there a crop I should avoid planting next

year? When I feel like it, I create lists and plan for the upcoming gardening season. It's never a chore because I do it when the mood strikes. I have plenty of time to revise and rework my [plans](#), too. The winter is a leisurely planning period – it never feels like work.

This restful period is well earned. As a gardener, I spend the spring, summer, and part of the [fall](#), prepping, planting, nurturing, and harvesting. It's hard work. By the winter, I'm spent. Now that the holidays are around the corner, I'm thankful to have the extra time to prepare to receive guests. It's also a time when the household starts to toss germs back and forth. I've been lucky enough to avoid winter illnesses for years. This time around, though, I've been walloped. I've been bundled up in my blanket, saddled with a fever and a throat that feels as if it's on fire. Sipping my herbal tea, I look out on the quiet, still garden, and feel grateful that we're both able to take advantage of a little rest.

How Much Dirt Does my Raised Bed Garden Need?



One of the benefits of raised bed gardening is the ability to use your own soil mix. It's a serious advantage for those stuck living in places where the soil quality is poor or where there's no soil to speak of (e.g., those who have a concrete yard).

But how do you figure out how much dirt you need for your raised bed? It seems daunting, but it's really a simple math problem.

How much soil do you need?

Here's what you need to calculate how much soil your garden bed requires:

The Dimensions of Your Garden Bed(s): What's the total volume of the bed's interior? Think back to high school math class now. Volume is determined by multiplying width, height, and depth.

Here's a real-world example:

- My beds are 4 feet by 4 feet, with a depth of 3 feet. The volume of the interior is $4 \times 4 \times 3 = 48$ cubic feet.
- If you have more than one bed, you'll need to multiply that total to get your final volume required.
- I have four beds of this size, so I'll need a total of $48 \times 4 = 192$ cubic feet of soil.

Thankfully, most soil is sold by the cubic foot, so it should be reasonably easy to figure out how many bags or truckloads you'll need to be delivered.

Buying from somewhere that uses a different unit of measurement? Use a simple conversion calculator online.

Your Soil Mix

You've figured out how much soil you need to fill your raised beds. Great! Now it's time to decide what type of mix you'll use to fill them.

Some garden centers sell and deliver soil mixes in bulk, but they're not always the right blend for a vegetable garden. Ask what the mix consists of before ordering.

The Square Foot Gardening Foundation recommends equal parts of the following when creating a homemade soil mix (also called *Mel's Mix*) for raised beds:

- Compost (preferably from a variety of sources)
- Peat moss
- Vermiculite

The mix promotes proper airflow and drainage. It's also filled with nutrients and doesn't dry out as quickly as other soil mixes.

Soil Mix on a Budget

Struggling with the high cost of bags of soil, compost, vermiculite, and peat moss? Check with your local garden center to find out about the cost of soil delivery. Deliveries in bulk – dumped in your driveway or on your property and not in bags – are typically cheaper than buying bags separately.

If that still seems too pricey, consider filling your boxes with compost only. It's not an ideal solution, but it's a workable and affordable one.

Because my boxes are quite high, filling them was a huge and expensive challenge. I had to find workarounds to be able to fill them without enough soil.

Bulk Up Your Beds

If you're on a tight budget, consider the use of filler materials to reach the desired soil level in your raised beds.

Use inexpensive things to bulk up your raised beds. Examples include:

- Dead leaves
- Sand
- Layers of cardboard
- Leftover dirt from construction projects (check online marketplaces for free dirt available around town)
- Rocks
- Poor-quality soil (snatch up cheap bags of filler soil at your local hardware store when it goes on sale . Fill up the bottom of your beds with the lower-quality stuff before adding a premium or custom mix on top)

Repel Cockroaches Naturally Using These Ingredients At Home

No one wants to see a cockroach running across the floor of their home. Cockroaches generally prefer to stay put of the light but they'll scuttle around if they have to. In fact, if you think you have a cockroach issue you should leave the room in darkness for 10 minutes and then quickly open the door and turn on the light, you'll see the disappearing.

But, it's more than just an unpleasant feeling. Cockroaches are known to carry several dangerous diseases, including cholera, dysentery, typhoid, [salmonellosis](#), and even the plague. In short, you don't want them in your house.

If you've seen them in your home you need to [click here](#) and get in contact with an expert who can eradicate the issue for you. It's not enough to kill the ones you see, you need to take care of all the ones in the nest. That's why you should get professional help. In fact, the best firms will even give you advice regarding how to help keep the cockroaches away from your home. This is perhaps more important than dealing with the issue, you don't want them returning to bother you.

If you have an issue and aren't sure who to contact then [click here](#).

The good news is that once the infestation is sorted you can repel cockroaches, you simply need to know the right ingredients to use.

Diatomaceous Earth

This white powder is actually a naturally occurring compound which is the fossilized remains of diatoms. These are single-cell algae with hard shells that have died millions of years ago.

The great thing is that you can purchase food-grade diatomaceous earth and it is completely harmless to humans and pets. The powder can be easily mixed with any type of food, such as some cocoa powder. You then put this down so that the roaches can help themselves.

Unfortunately for them, once they consume this powder it starts to destroy their exoskeletons, effectively killing them. You will also have some success targeting the nest in this way as cockroaches will take the bait back to the nest with them, infecting more than one cockroach at a time.

Essential Oils

Peppermint oil is particularly effective when dealing with roaches. However, lavender oil, citronella, and other essential oils are effective when dealing with other pests.

Unfortunately, this doesn't have the same effect as diatomaceous earth. Instead of killing the cockroaches they simply don't like the scent and will stay away from it. You can mix a few drops of essential oil with a little water in a spray bottle and cover the internal perimeter of your home. It will help to keep the roaches away.

Catnip

You may be surprised to learn that roaches don't like catnip. Specifically, they don't like [nepetalactone](#) which is the active ingredient in catnip.

Again, this isn't something that will kill the roaches. But, placed in a variety of strategic positions around the home it will help to ensure they don't enter your home.

Prepping for the Holidays: Cooking in Advance



Canadian Thanksgiving has already come and gone, but Americans are patiently awaiting the day when they'll get to enjoy turkey, stuffing, and all the delicious sides. Other holidays are around the corner, too. Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hannukah, and New Years, all coming in hot. Are you already stressing about your next family gathering? Whether you're the host who's fretting about what to put on the table or you're worried about what to contribute to the tablescape as a guest, there's no shortage of anxiety around the holidays. There's certainly enough stress to go around! In the summer, the bounty of the garden makes it easy to whip up last minute salads and pasta dishes. In the fall and winter, when the garden has closed

down for the year, pickings are slim. So what's a gardener to do to impress?

As soon as Halloween has come and gone, I tuck away the spooky decor and autumn motifs. I lug out the big plastic bin from under the stairs and pick out a few wintry decorations to adorn the credenza. I also start to think about cozier food fare. In the kitchen, I cook up soups and stews. I swap t-shirts for sweaters and always have the perfect candle burning (right now, it's a delicious cranberry one).

I also find myself prepping more foods. I batch cook and freeze leftover portions because it's not always easy to muster up the desire to chop, stir, and cook during the cold months. I love to cook, don't get me wrong! But winter is also my favorite time for reading, and I sometimes find it hard to pry myself away from a good story.

November and December have me thinking about upcoming festivities. I wonder not only about what I can bring to the dinner, party, or gathering. I'm also thinking about how I can show others I care. It's not always easy when you're on a tight budget. Cooking and baking is one of the easiest ways to spread joy and bring people together. A tin of homemade cookies is a truly heartfelt gift. A jar of homemade jam is one of my favorite gifts to receive. At this time of year, I love creating goodies for loved ones in my kitchen. I also love to learn and try new things. This year, it's making pies.

A plan: making dough ahead of time

I'm part of a cookbook club and our book this month is all about baking. Pies specifically. I don't love sweets, but I'm eager to learn new skills and find new ways to combine delicious flavors. Pies, though, are intimidating to the novice baker. My plan to tackle the myriad of recipes is to cut the steps up into pieces. Making the dough in advance, freezing it, and saving the assembly part for another day. I

don't really like pies all that much. I'm not much of a sweets person. But I figure I'll be all set for the holidays if my freezer is packed to the brim with premade dough and pies.

Here's the [recipe for the pie crust](#) I'll be trying. Join me in a pie-making adventure this November. Tell me about your trials, tribulations, and successes.

What's a non-gardening winter activity that helps you cope with the months away from regular gardening duties? I can't be the only gardener who seeks to fill the void in winter by trying out other unexplored hobbies and activities.

Closing Down the Garden



Here's your quick reminder that now is probably the time to

start thinking about closing up the garden if you haven't already done so. The cold weather is slowly trickling in, and garden production is creeping to a halt. Don't wait till the last minute to put away tools, pull out plants, and get everything ready for the [winter](#) season. Scrambling at the last minute is a pain in the neck. Trust me. I've done it. Once the snow starts to fall, every task you had planned becomes infinitely more challenging to complete. What does closing the garden entail? Here's a quick breakdown of tasks to put on your to-do list:

Pull out dead plants. Don't leave dead plant material behind. It's likely to attract pests and may even be harboring disease.

Cut back perennials (Careful. Some perennials are best pruned in the fall, while others do best when pruned in the spring).

Don't stop harvesting. There are likely still a few goodies left to pick; be it lettuce, [kale](#), or Asian greens.

Tackle any overgrown areas that are filled with weeds. If you don't do it now, you'll have to deal with it in the spring.

Tidy up accessories. Put away any decorations or delicate items sitting around your garden, deck, porch, or patio.

Disinfect. Clean your tools and store them safely away. Tidy up your [seed starting](#) equipment if you haven't already.

Mulch, mulch, mulch. Mulch tender plants and perennials before winter arrives.

Add protection. Protect your winter-hardy plants with a cold frame if you haven't done so yet. Don't forget to keep watering them!

Encourage healthy soil. Consider planting cover crops if it's still warm enough in your area.

There's still time for planting, too! Fall is the ideal planting time for a variety of flower bulbs. If you've ordered seed [garlic](#), you should be receiving it soon and planting it as soon as it arrives. Certain trees and shrubs also do best when planted in the fall.

Keep watering your plants. They ain't all dead yet and they're still thirsty!

Prep your beds. I like to mulch mine with leaves prior to the winter. This year, I've also added cardboard atop my beds to keep weeds down. I'll enjoy a bit of a blank slate when the spring comes around.

Do you have any fall garden rituals? Is there something you always forget to do? Have you learned new tricks of the trade throughout the years? Leave a comment and share your garden clean up tips!

5 Quick-Growing Trees to Consider Planting This Fall



Fall is the optimal time to plant many tree species. It's dryer than most months and not too warm. Heat is unlikely to damage young newly planted trees, and root systems are more likely to thrive in fall conditions.

If you're looking for a quick-growing tree to plant this fall, we've got five suggestions below.

A word of caution: while fast-growing trees are an attractive option for those who want quick results, they're not always an ideal choice. If you're in need of a tree to act as a windbreak or to provide shade, don't jump into planting without doing your research. Ask questions, and don't plant something without doing due diligence; you may later regret your decision. Rapid growing plants of all kinds pose a few significant problems of note. Quick-growing trees are more likely to experience breakage. Some trees may grow so fast that they're challenging to care for and keep healthy.

Red Maple

Red maples are native to eastern and central North America and are one of my favorite trees. If you're out and about in the fall for leaf-peeping, chances are you're searching for red maples since they provide a blast of brilliant foliage in the autumn. They're relatively rapid growers and can grow up to 60 feet in height. Unfortunately, the rapid growth, in turn, produces weak branches that are susceptible to breakage.

Paper Birch

The thin wisps of paper-like bark that peel off this tree are perfect for use as kindling when building a campfire. Paper birch trees are also fast growers. They grow relatively tall – up to 70 feet in height, but they're susceptible to breakage and don't thrive in areas with high levels of pollution.

Cherry Laurel

While this is more of a shrub than a tree, it grows quickly and is one of the sturdier options in this list of five. It doesn't grow much taller than 30 feet and I love it for its colorful berries – careful, though! They're poisonous. Planted incorrectly and without thought, cherry laurel may become invasive, so don't plant without doing some background research.

Bald Cypress

These coniferous trees grow in swampy around in the Southern U.S. They get fairly tall (over 60 feet). They look impressive, but they're vulnerable to pests. They're also a little slower to grow than the other trees mentioned.

Acacia

I love acacias, but they're destined for warmer climates than here, unfortunately. If you're lucky enough to live in planting zones 9 to 11, though, you can enjoy the lovely

display of this tree on your property. The maximum height depends on the variety. The drawback to growing acacias? They're a short-lived tree species.

Avoid These 5 Costly Fall Garden Mistakes



Summertime errors in gardening are usually easy to fix. Forgot to prune your tomatoes, and now the foliage is out-of-control? No problem. Just trim the excess and choose an appropriate support structure. Forgot to water for a few days? Most plants will be fine, and if not, it's likely you still have time to re-plant or re-sow.

Early in the season, mistakes are a little more challenging to

handle. Didn't choose the right seed starting medium, and now your seedlings are suffering from damping off? Yikes. You'll have to start all over again. The situation is salvageable but frustrating. Thankfully, though, errors in seed starting aren't typically expensive to remedy.

If you mess up in the fall, though. Mistakes may be costly. Here are five mistakes you don't want to make when temperatures dip and the leaves start to change:

Not storing your hose for the winter

I've accidentally forgotten my hose outside on multiple occasions. It often happens because winter sort of sneaks up on us like a ghost. One day it's pleasantly cool out, the next, we're experiencing a snowstorm of epic proportions. Leaving your hose outside when the snow starts to pile up means you'll likely have to purchase a new one next year. The cold will freeze any remaining water droplets inside, which can expand and rupture the tube. Even if you've adequately drained the accessory, freezing cold weather is enough to crack the exterior of your hose and render it useless.

Not shutting off outdoor water supply

Even if snowstorms haven't yet arrived, temperatures below zero can burst outdoor pipes and damage any outdoor water accessories, like hoses. In our household, we typically shut off the outdoor water supply in October (this weekend, actually). In our region, the season is rainy enough to support any remaining plant life, and if not, it's easy enough to hand-water the minimal number of plants still left in the garden.

Leaving dead plant matter in your garden beds

It's so easy to do, but please don't do it! Thoroughly clean up your beds to prevent pesky organisms from hiding out. You might find yourself haunted by your mistake next season. It's

especially important to remove dead plants if they were diseased or infested in any way.

Tossing diseased plants in your compost

When removing dead plants, don't throw them into your compost bin. If your city has a brown bin, toss dead plants there, instead. Home compost bins just don't reach the same temperatures as large commercial piles, so they're unable to kill certain bacteria and fungi that cause disease. I like to stay on the safe side and put all my spent plants in the city compost. I'm too paranoid about pest and disease to take a chance.

Not wearing long pants and gloves while raking

I hate raking, which is why I've often cut corners when performing this task in the past. I rush through it, wearing whatever I threw on in the morning, and I often forget to don gloves. This is BAD. Don't do it. Always wear a long-sleeved shirt, pants, and gloves when cleaning up leaves. Why? Ticks love to hide out in leaf debris. I'd also suggest keeping your pets away from large piles of leaves to prevent them from picking up these disease-ridden bloodsuckers.

If You Only Grow One Type of Spinach Let This One Be It



The weather has been up and down lately. One moment it's freezing cold, the next there's a mini-heatwave. It makes me glad that I didn't bother to plant too much in pursuit of a fall and winter harvest. A few carrot and beet tops are peeking out of the ground, the zinnias are still in full bloom (everyone asks about them – they're genuinely the best annual flower!), there's still chard growing in one patch, and the perpetual spinach I planted in the spring looks AMAZING.

What's Perpetual Spinach?

Although it looks and tastes like spinach, it's actually a relative of beets and chard. While I enjoy beet tops occasionally and love the vibrancy of multi-colored chard, spinach has a distinct flavor that I love to include in a variety of dishes.

Unfortunately, spinach is a pain in the neck to grow in the spring unless you plant early enough. Planting early means having some way of heating the soil (e.g., hoop tunnels).

Since I don't, I need to plant spinach as soon as the ground warms, which can sometimes be as late as May. In recent years, the soil warms up later and later, and the summer rides in without notice. The sudden heat this year left me with spinach that bolted in seedling form. I didn't even get to harvest a single leaf.

Planting in the fall is possible, but sudden heat waves can also ruin the party for spinach-lovers. Is there a way for frugal gardeners to enjoy spinach without having to invest in crop protection accessories or make the extra effort to protect seedlings from the heat? There is indeed! If you've ever had trouble growing spinach, consider its perpetual cousin.

My Experience With Perpetual Spinach

I planted perpetual spinach in the late spring expecting it to bolt as quickly as the rest of my spinach and watched as the leaves unfurled and grew without shooting out seed stalks. Curious, I left the leafy greens alone, and mostly forgot that they were even there since they were partially hidden by the bean bushes nearby.

At the height of the summer, the leaves yellowed slightly, and the plants wilted, though they didn't die off completely. I considered pulling the crop, but thankfully my hesitation caused me to leave the plants be. I'm glad I stepped away. In the last few weeks, the chillier weather seems to have given the spinach a whole new lease on life. The plants are bigger than ever before and are a beautiful bright green. Better yet, no pests seem to have taken an interest. I expect the cut-and-come-again crop will last well into the fall and maybe a few weeks into winter.

I highly recommend planting this pseudo-spinach in your garden. It's definitely making the regular rotation in mine!

Please, I Beg You. Bring in Your Tender Potted Plants!



Every year around this time as I walk around the neighborhood with my dogs or pass by homes on my morning runs, I see the insane amount of people who throw away potted plants. In the summer, when the weather is hot and toasty, people calmer to buy all the beautiful plants at the nursery. In the spring, baskets of flowers are popular. In the middle of the summer, people buy tropical palms and glorious ferns to hang around their backyard patios. Now, during the fall, its chrysanthemums are all the rage. Pumpkins start to appear on front porches, too.

I love seeing all this plant life around town. And I'm just as susceptible to plant sales and attractive displays of

greenery. This summer, I brought a gorgeous banana plant home and found it a home on my back deck among a pretty display of string lights. With a single plant, I created a tropical atmosphere and made the space the perfect place to relax, unwind, and entertain.

Almost as soon as September rolled around, though, the nighttime temperatures dipped considerably. Afraid that my plants (I also bought two pink-stemmed plants to adorn my patio table) would succumb to the cold, I promptly brought them inside.

I urge all plant lovers and frugal gardeners to do the same! Those beautiful heat-loving tropicals can't hack frosty temps, and while some are more tender than others, it's better to be safe than sorry. Bring in your potted plants and enjoy their blooms and foliage for an extended period of time.

I placed my banana tree in my living room, and it's my new favorite place to hang out. I feel like I'm in a cozy indoor oasis. Don't leave your plants out to die! Don't let them wither away! What a waste of money! Take care of your precious plants by sheltering them from the cold, and you'll be rewarded with a continued display of beauty. If you manage to adequately care for your plants during the winter, you'll be able to set them out again once the weather warms. You'll escape the need to spend money next spring.

Many potted plants don't need as much attention in the winter anyhow, so bringing them in won't leave you with extra work on your hands. Watering needs typically diminish during the cold months. Tropical plants, however, may require higher levels of humidity than are possible in your winter home. Place a humidifier nearby or spritz your plants with a spray bottle every so often. The spring is the best time to re-home your plant into a slightly larger vessel.

Don't have any tropical plants or potted flowers to bring

inside? If you have a potted vegetable plant, it may be a good idea to bring that in, as well. Shelter potted peppers indoors and you'll have an extended harvest. Give them plenty of warmth and sunlight, and you'll be able to pick peppers throughout the off-season.

Do you bring your potted plants indoors? Have you been able to keep a plant alive for more than a season this way? Share your story in the comments!

5 Things You Can Probably Still Plant Now for a Fall Harvest



The warmth has returned for but a moment this week, though it definitely gets chilly throughout the night. As I slowly pull out spent crops from the garden, I'm still taking the time to pay attention to new seedlings poking through the earth. That's right. Things are still growing in the garden! Even as fall approaches, there are crops thriving in the cool air. Plants that wilted and struggled in the heat of the summer are now happy as can be. Cabbage heads grow bigger and small greens are growing bigger each day. I planted seeds at the end of August in hopes for a small final harvest of the vegetables that I don't often get to plant at the start of the season. Here, our spring is vicious and cold and by the time it heats up, it's too late for things like spinach because the afternoon sun is unforgiving.

At this time of year, my focus narrows. Most of the garden is slowly put to bed and I bring my still-growing crops closer to the home. I move containers to my deck and focus my new plantings in my large raised bed right outside my kitchen. I have bok choy, spinach, kale, and arugula growing happily there. For some of you, there may still be ample time to sow a few seeds here and there. The key is choosing the right crops. A final sowing might seem like a bit of effort, but you'll be thankful for the extra harvest for your dinner plate. Another chance to save on your grocery bill!

Important criteria for late plantings

Maturity date: Always always check the time to maturity for anything you plan to sow this late in the season. It's pointless to plant seeds for rutabaga or cabbage, for instance. The weather may be ideal right now, but they won't be able to grow quickly enough before your first frost date.

Weather forecast: Is a frost expected anytime soon? An early frost might be a problem for certain tender greens. Choose hardier varieties that can survive frost exposure if there's any worry that a frost might arrive early.

First frost date: When is your first expected frost date? Once

it gets cold enough, even the toughest of plants stop growing. You'll need enough time between sowing and a frost to allow your plants to grow big enough for eating.

Manage Expectations

Mother Nature is unpredictable. Even if you're early enough, an early frost might damage certain plantings and slow growth rates. Or, a sudden heat wave may stress your cool-season vegetables. Be ready for the unexpected and try not to take a loss too personally.

Best picks for late planting

Here are my top five suggestions for late planting. They're an excellent option because they prefer cool weather, they're quick to mature, they're mostly problem-free, and they're fairly cold hardy.

Arugula: Most varieties grow very quickly and thrive in cool weather.

Mesclun: Choose a winter blend if you're planting late. Mesclun is a awesome choice for late planting because it's often best when picked and eaten at the baby leaf stage.

Bok Choy: You'll have fewer pest problems at the tail end of the season with this brassica crop and no issues with early bolting. Bok choy is also delicious when picked early.

Spinach: If you're in zone 5 like me, you probably have plenty of trouble sowing spinach early enough in the spring to get a sizeable harvest. In the heat, spinach germinates practically already bolted. It grows quickly and leaves can be eaten at any size.

Radishes: Another quick-growing crop that tastes better when grown in cooler weather. The warmth often leads to pungent radishes. Even if you pick your radishes and discover an absence of bulbs, the tops can also be eaten.