

Fall is Slowly Approaching: What to Do in the Garden



As soon as the calendar flipped to September and 'back to school' was declared, Mother Nature seemed to follow suit. Nighttime temperatures chilled rapidly, and in the mornings, I need to throw on a sweater to head outside. I've wholeheartedly embraced the fall season. My pumpkin decorations are out, my candles are flickering on the credenza, and I'm dreaming about all the fun fall activities I want to partake in the coming months. Everything suddenly feels cozier. I'm eager to curl up and read through my TBR (to-be-read) pile of books. I'm irrationally upset over the fact that my wardrobe doesn't contain more orange hues. My weekly meal plan consists of stews, soups, and root vegetables. Fall is early, and I hope it's here to stay.

As a gardener, the arrival of fall typically means it's time

to begin the yearly ritual cleanup. I try to get through it bit by bit, attacking some tasks earlier than others, so as not to overwhelm myself in late October or November. If you're noticing the chill sneaking up on you, but you're unsure where to start with your cleanup, here are a few suggestions:

Get rid of nightshades: Heat-loving plants are the first to be extracted from my garden. The cold nights begin to stress the eggplants and peppers. A few tomatoes might still appear, but if your plants are no longer producing, browning, and looking less than perky it's time to pull them and toss them in the brown bin. Never throw diseased plants in your compost, but feel free to toss healthy ones in there.

Save some bean seeds: I've left my first bean plants to die out because I'm planning to save some seeds from a few forgotten pods. Saving bean seeds is incredibly easy, and if you do it, you won't have to spend money on packets for next season. Leave the pods and harvest the seeds once the pods have dried out completely.

Get rid of anything disease or pest-infested: Toss skeletonize kale and brassicas into your city compost bin.

Cover beds: If you're growing anything for a late harvest, you may want to consider adding protection if you're in a particularly cold climate. A bit of cover is also useful to prevent leaves from falling all over your beds. It'll also keep pesky squirrels from snatching a last-minute snack.

Remove non-permanent structures: Decorations, non-permanent trellises, and unused pots and containers can be put away in the shed or garage for the season. Any summer tools (e.g., shade cloth) can be stored away safely, too.

Don't forget your fall crops. If you're growing things like arugula, lettuce, and spinach for a fall or winter harvest, don't forget about them. Even in the chillier weather, your

plants need to be watered and cared for.

Do these things bit by bit and you'll discover that the end of the gardening season will become a lot less stressful. It's the exact same way I treat my house cleaning chores. I do a little bit of something every day. That way, I'm not left pulling my hair to get it all in in a single day.

Easy Preserving for the Frugal Gardener: Tomato Edition



I'll say it loud and clear, I love the idea of canning, but I hate going through the process. It's long and tedious. I'm

always left feeling paranoid that I've done something wildly wrong, which will leave me with botulism infested jars.

It's one of the reasons I'm partial to quick-pickling and other easy preservation methods. Recently, I was struggling to think of ways to use tomatoes in my cooking. I was adamant that I didn't want to make sauce or do anything boring. I wanted a unique way to use the mountain of tomatoes that had accumulated on my counter. Alas, my efforts to think of anything creative didn't really materialize. Honestly, despite the vast amount of tomatoes on my hands these days, I'm uninterested in eating them except for occasionally in a sandwich.

It's one of the reasons I'm of the belief that tomatoes are overrated. Don't get me wrong, tomatoes are excellent food! But, they're very one-note. As someone who enjoys cooking a lot of Asian meals, tomatoes are tough to use up. They don't exactly fit into a stir fry dish!

So this weekend I stared at the beautiful mix of yellow, red, and purple tomatoes in my kitchen and decided to stop worrying about being creative. I cooked them down with the addition of a few spices and used my trusty handheld blender (AKA: immersion blender) to create a thick super-tomato-ey sauce. The glorious pile of tomatoes made enough for two 750 mL jars of sauce. I expect more tomatoes to arrive in the near future, so the two jars suited me just fine.

After letting the sauce cool a bit – a very small bit because I'm impatient – I poured it into the jars and left them to cool a little longer because everything was still piping hot. Later, I popped them into my basement freezer.

Super easy, right? Instead of letting my tomatoes go to waste, I made a sauce that I'll be able to pull out of the freezer anytime I need it. For pasta, pizza, and whatever else. The jars are relatively large, so I envision one will last us

through a few delicious meals. I'm sure I'll be thankful for my minimal effort when winter comes at us full throttle.

Another bonus? I won't have to spend money on jars of tomato sauce, which are surprisingly expensive at the supermarket!

Do you have other simple sauces or recipes that you like to make in order to preserve your harvest? Sound off in the comments!

Cooking on the Cheap: Snacking from Your Garden



Believe it or not, for me, one of the toughest parts about gardening is figuring out how to utilize the harvest. Often, I

find myself sharing the abundance with others because I can't handle it all. When the determinate tomatoes set their fruit all at once, I'm overwhelmed by what to do with them all. When the cucumber plants produce more than I can eat in a week, I panic over how to use them up. A little bit of foresight goes a long way to fully utilize everything in the garden. Canning, dehydrating, and finding other ways to incorporate veggies in all my meals is one way to use up what I pick from the garden, but I don't always have time to plan and prepare foods this way.

Canning requires a fair amount of time, which I don't always have. Quick-pickling is easy and fun, but I couldn't possibly consume all those pickles on my own!

I try to bake, roast, and sauce-up all the vegetables in my garden, but when the harvest is bountiful, that's not always enough to get through it all. It's taken a lot of practice to prevent waste, but it still happens. I've had to really sink my teeth into meal planning to maximize my returns and minimize wasted produce. Meal planning, in combination with crop planning, is the surest way to avoid disappointment.

Another way that I incorporate fresh vegetables into my diet is by snacking on them. By munching on raw (or cooked if you prefer) veg, I not only incorporate plenty of healthy nutrients in my daily caloric intake, I also use up otherwise tough to cook with veggies.

Garden Snack Ideas

Here are a few examples of snack ideas along with extra tips for using your harvest:

Celery: Whether I'm growing in the garden or snatching some up at the local farm stand, celery is one of my favorite veggie snacks. I love to eat it with peanut butter. If you get sick of snacking on celery snicks, use this veg for flavoring all

sorts of dishes, including soups and stews.

Carrots: Who doesn't love a freshly picked carrot? Last week, I harvested a patch, and my dogs were close by, eager to delight in this sweet treat. Carrots taste great alone and are the quintessential healthy snack food. Zap them in the food processor if you're in the mood for a more substantial meal and make a carrot slaw for lunch or to accompany your dinner.

Tomatoes: When you think of a snack, you're probably not thinking about salads. But a plate of fresh sliced tomatoes, topped with salt, pepper, and bocconcini cheese is a gourmet-style afternoon indulgence. It's the perfect reward for growing those delicious tomatoes, isn't it? Entertaining guests? Make cherry tomato skewers for easy one-handed eating.

Cucumbers: These taste great on their own with a little bit of salt and pepper. It's one of the only ways I enjoy eating cucumber – besides inside a sandwich.

Snap peas: If I'm not cutting these up to enjoy inside a stir fry, I'm eating them raw along with other fresh veggies.

Kale: Bake these low and slow for a few minutes or pop them inside a dehydrator to make kale chips. Adjust the salt content to your liking. Kale chips are a great alternative to regular chips loaded with saturated fat.

Berries: If you're lucky enough to grow any type of berry, boy, do you have a snack-worthy fruit on your hands. I've only started growing berries, so my patches are smaller than I'd like and only churn out a few strawberries at a time. How to enjoy a handful of berries as a snack? Eat them as is, or add them to yogurt or ice cream.

For the frugal gardeners, snacking doesn't have to be an expensive pursuit. Avoid costly, highly-processed foods from the grocery store and enjoy the tasty treasures sitting right

in front of you!

What are your favorite ways to enjoy your veggie snacks? Tell me in the comments!

Next week, I'll be back with some meal planning tips to help you use what you grow, along with some suggestions of meal planning tools that I love and use frequently.

4 Reasons to Plant Flowers in and Around Your Vegetable Garden



For a long time, I thought planting flowers was a pointless and frivolous gardening activity. Sure, they looked nice, but I was much more interested in growing food. Being able to grow frequently eaten foods such as lettuce, tomatoes, and arugula,

meant that my grocery bills were lower, and I was even able to share excess produce with friends and family. Growing produce is still the focus of my gardening efforts, but now, I put equal effort into cultivating a balanced ecosystem that includes flowering plants.

Why plant flowers?

Aesthetic: There's no denying that a patch of flowers around the garden looks beautiful. Well placed flowering plants pull together an outdoor space and really allow it to shine. A few containers of brightly colored gerberas on my back deck add a look I couldn't otherwise achieve with simple greenery.

Attract pollinators: Flowers are an essential food source for many pollinators, and the colorful blooms will bring bees and other buzzing beneficial insects to the fray. Pick native flowering plants, and each time you step into your outdoor space, you'll notice that your garden is vibrating with energy.

Attract predatory insects: Some flowering herbs and plants also attract predatory insects that can help you take a bite out of pest problems – and even avoid them altogether. Catmint, for instance, attracts lacewing insects, which in turn devour pests such as aphids and Japanese beetles. The tiny flowers on this herb also attract bees.

Enjoy cut flowers for free: If you're anything like me, you love having a bouquet of fresh-picked flowers on your coffee table or kitchen windowsill. It's a beautiful way to bring the outdoors inside, but buying plants from a flower shop is an expensive purchase that most frugal gardeners aren't able to afford. Even those with a sufficient budget to buy cut flowers are wary of spending money on this type of expense. Planting flowers in your garden allows you to have a steady supply of cut flowers for your home. My favorite are zinnias. Start a few indoors, transplant in the spring and in mid- to late

summer you'll be rewarded with a prolific patch of delicate and colorful blooms.

Annual versus perennial

Plant a variety of flowers including perennial *and* annual varieties to ensure you have a varied array of blooms. I like to cover the bulk of my flower-designated areas with perennials since they're low maintenance and don't require me to purchase new seed each year. I do enjoy planting a few annual varieties (zinnias, for example), though. Don't be afraid to ask nursery employees for suggestions on what to plant.

When in doubt, pick drought-tolerant perennials, and you can enjoy a flowery display without too much effort!

The No-Cost Way to Increased Tomato Yields: Pruning



Hi, everyone! Apologies for the late posting.

I've known what I wanted to talk about this week for a while, but honestly, it's tough to explain it well without a visual aid. Pruning tomatoes is one of the tasks that I either excel at or fail miserably to keep up with. I'm either diligent in staking, pruning, and keeping my tomatoes organized and tidy or I forget to stay on top of the chore and end up with sprawling plants.

Here's an excellent pruning guide to help you out with the task this summer:

Different gardeners have different pruning preferences. You can choose to lightly prune your plants or aggressively remove branches as you see fit. With a bit of trial and error, you'll find a method that works for you.

Why prune tomatoes?

There are a few reasons to keep up with this garden chore:

- **Prevents disease:** Let your tomato plants sprawl on the ground, and they're more likely to pick up disease from contaminated soil.
- **Improves air circulation:** This is especially true if you're planting things closely together (like I do with the Square Foot Gardening method).
- **Better yield:** If your tomato plant is busy throwing its energy into growing big, green leaves, you'll undoubtedly have fewer tomatoes. Pruning help re-route that energy to where it matters: growing big juicy tomatoes!
- **Controls growth:** Pruning prevents your plants from getting out of control, which allows for easier upkeep and maintenance. If your plant growth is left unchecked, foliage may shade nearby plants and completely block the sun for newly emerging seedlings. Pruning regularly also allows you the opportunity to inspect your plants carefully.

When should I not prune?

Don't bother pruning determinate tomato plants – these are varieties that set all their fruit at once. Pruning will significantly lower your yield.

If you don't feel like pruning, don't bother. There's no rule that says you NEED to. Sure, there are benefits, but you can also grow tasty tomatoes without the effort of pruning.

Dealing with Tomato Blight



I find it incredible that my garden can handle such intense weather variations. One week it's boiling outside, the next the temperature drops to a balmy 10 degrees celsius overnight. I'm grateful for the respite from the heat, but cooler, wet weather brings along a whole other set of problems, including tomato blight.

What is tomato blight?

Blight actually refers to a collection of fungal diseases that

affect most nightshade plants (e.g., potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers). The condition advances rapidly, turning leaves brown and leaving your plant looking like it's on its last legs. Blight can also affect the main stem of your plant and, in advanced stages, can even affect the fruit.

What causes blight?

There's a downside to cool weather, especially if the air is humid rather than dry. Plant diseases – fungi and bacteria – love damp, moist conditions.

Measures to avoid blight

Prevention is the best cure for any type of garden disease. To stop this fungal infection from spreading among your nightshades do the following:

- **Practice proper crop rotation.** If blight hits your plants this year, planting them in the same location will lead to a predictable outcome.
- **Avoid watering plant foliage.** Don't get the leaves of your plant wet. Water from below, instead.
- **Allow for adequate air circulation.** Space the plants appropriately and prune as needed to ensure your plants aren't squished together. Better airflow ensures that even after heavy rainfall, your plants won't stay humid and moist.
- **Keep leaves off the ground.** Trim and prune the bottom leaves of your tomato plants. If they fall onto the soil, they're more likely come into contact with a fungal infection.
- **Use supports.** Letting your tomato plants sprawl is the lazy gardener's way, but it's also an ideal way for your plants to contract blight. Use stakes or tomato cages to keep your plants off the ground.

What happens if my plants are already affected?

Trim off diseased portions of your plants. If the disease has spread too much and your plant is too far gone, remove it from your garden. Do not toss it into the compost pile.

Fungicides are another option. I suggest opting for organic products. This solution is best when blight is caught early. Avoid relying on chemicals to solve problems like these. They may work in the short term, but prevention is the best way to avoid long-term issues and spending money down the line.

Gardening During a Heatwave



We're currently experiencing another heatwave where I'm located and boy oh boy does it ever make gardening a real

chore. I'm incredibly thankful that our home is equipped with A/C, but when the temperature reaches over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, I hate going outside even if I can cool down when I return inside.

We aren't the only ones suffering in the extreme heat. Pets are vulnerable during these scorches, *and* garden plants suffer, too. I find it incredibly tough to go outside, but it's in this scorching weather that my garden needs me the most! When it's this hot, plants wilt quicker and need more water than ever. I have to water twice a day to keep them from withering away. I have to provide them with shade – even the plants that love the heat! It's simply too hot for anything to thrive. Production slows, as well. Blossom drop occurs, and I find myself harvesting fewer eggplants, tomatoes, and peppers. Bolt-resistant varieties of lettuce are not shooting up stalks like never before.

During a heatwave, there's plenty to do in the garden, even if I'm wary of stepping outside. Here are some tips to stay safe when gardening during a heatwave:

- **Drink water.** Don't just wait until you get back inside. You never know when a garden task might take longer than expected. Take a water bottle outside with you.
- **Garden in the early morning and late evening.** It may still be hot and humid, but at least you won't have to contend with the sun.
- **Save the heavy lifting for another day.** Unless it's a vitally important task, don't bother with sweat-inducing chores during a heatwave. Keep them for a cooler day. If you must do hard physical labor, avoid doing it during the hottest part of the day.
- **Wear a hat!** Even on cooler days! Keep your noggin' protected from harmful UV rays.
- **Slather on sunscreen.** Yes, even if you're only out for a few minutes. You may end up having a conversation with a neighbor finding yourself doing extra chores. Don't end

up outside without sunscreen.

- **Take breaks.** It's that time of year when there's so much to do. Harvesting, succession sowing, and turning the compost pile. You can't merely put those tasks aside because of the weather, right? That's fine. If there's stuff you need to do, just be sure to take periodic breaks.
- **Listen to your body.** Keep tabs on how you're feeling. Getting dizzy? Are you feeling nauseous? Head inside to a cooler area. Don't risk heat sickness or heatstroke.

Are you worried about your plants during a heatwave? Keep them watered and avoid watering when the sun is out (water will evaporate quickly, and wet leaves increase the chances of sunscald). Harvest at dawn or dusk to avoid stressing your plants. Harvesting in the heat will leave you with limp produce.

Watch the weather. Periods of severe heat and humidity are often accompanied by thunderstorms. Conserve water by strategically watering.

Remember, you can't control the weather! Don't feel like a failure if you incur losses during a heatwave.

2 Important Recent Gardening Mistakes: Lessons to Share



I made two serious gardening mistakes this season that I think are worth sharing with you all. One was a mistake that I shouldn't have made and another a simple error with significant consequences.

This summer has been tough for gardening. Things are growing, but the numerous heat waves have caused plants to struggle. Even the ones who love the sun and heat! This type of extreme weather already has me thinking about the future of my garden. Will I be able to plant the myriad of greens I typically enjoy planting in the spring ever again? The shortened spring and quick arriving summer weather made it challenging to plant some of the stuff I'm used to. Now, the heat is causing even my peppers blossoms to drop. I've already begun browsing seed catalogs to find heat-tolerant varieties of everything I like to plant.

Enough lamenting about the weather, though. Here are the two

mistakes I will aim never to make again:

1. Not checking nursery plants for insects

I was in such a hurry to plant and fill out my garden beds after a mass seedling failure that I bought plants without checking for pests that had already taken up residence. I was careful to throw away leftover seed starting mix after the seedling massacre because it's clear that something was contaminated. In my rush, though, I planted healthy veg without looking for hiding insects, and I suffered the consequences. My pest covers were working wonders until I introduced an already infested plant underneath. The cabbage worm population increased exponentially, so I've had to continuously head to the garden each day to pick them off and control the infestation. Thankfully, the kale has grown big and strong and can handle a bit of damage.

2. Leaving the pest cover open overnight.

I have another bed covered to prevent pests, but a few nights ago, I completely forgot to close it. Cabbage moths quickly found their way inside and had a party. Instead of having another batch of brassicas infested, I decided to pull up most of the kale in that bed and plant fall carrots, beans, and beets that won't succumb to these pests. I left a few plants, though, as sacrificial items that I hope might draw cabbage moths away from other brassicas. While this was a costly mistake that was preventable, I'm less upset about it. Because, honestly, sh*t happens in the garden and all you can do is shrug it off and find a way to deal with or make the best of it.

Which pest is giving you a hard time this year?

Have you had the problem before and do you intend to plant the vegetable again next year? Why or why not? Leave a comment and tell me about it!

Watering Tips to Avoid Waste & Unhappy Plants



Think about the last time you were severely dehydrated. You probably felt sluggish. Maybe you also had a pounding headache. Overall, it's not a fun experience. A garden probably feels the same way when it lacks water. Like humans, plants need H₂O to survive and can't live long without hydration.

Over the years, I've learned a thing or two about best watering practices, but I've also managed to create my own routine. I know some gardeners who prefer to irrigate their beds. Others prefer to use sprinkler systems. The watering method you choose is entirely up to you.

I use a hose with multiple nozzle settings and use a gentle spray to water my vegetable plants. I like the multi-function

nozzle because I can use it for other outdoor tasks (like bathing my dogs, which they hate with a passion!). My hose is expandable and ultra-long, so I can reach every area of my garden without struggling or hauling around a bulky accessory.

It's important to me that I water carefully and considerately to prevent waste. Water is a precious resource, after all.

Here are a few tips to keep your thirsty plants happy while avoiding waste:

- **Water in the early morning or late evening.** It's incredibly pointless to water once the sun is high up in the sky. The strong rays will quickly evaporate lingering moisture on the topsoil and you run the risk of burning foliage. Little droplets that sit on leaves turn into magnifying glasses that will intensify the sun's heat and damage plants. It's also just a lot more pleasant to water when the temperatures are bearable, and the sun isn't beating down on you. Your city may also have special rules about watering times. Watering outside of those hours (usually morning and evening) can get you into trouble.
- **Water from below.** Getting leaves wet won't always cause problems, but you increase the risk of disease occurrence and pest activity. Water from below is also more effective since plants typically draw moisture via their roots.
- **Mulch. Mulch. Mulch.** Heavy mulching has been a game changer for me. For a long time, I struggled to keep my plants well watered. The topsoil would dry out rapidly, and I'd be left with a desiccated wasteland. When I started mulching around the base of my plants, I discovered that I could conserve moisture, water less frequently, and keep my plants happy. Now, I'm never

without mulch on hand. I typically use straw, wood chips, or coco coir to mulch my plants.

- **Check in with Mother Nature.** Check the weather forecast and keep track of how much it has rained. It's entirely unnecessary to water your garden if there was a rainstorm the night prior. We're having a rainy summer this year, and I've been carefully monitoring the forecast to ensure I don't double water for no reason. Letting Mother Nature do the work gives me a nice break once in a while, too.

Have you added mulch to your garden? If you haven't, I guarantee that this step will change your frugal gardening life! It's well worth the initial effort. Don't forget to check the weather for this week and plan your watering schedule accordingly.

3 Vegetables You Can Use from Top to Bottom



Avoiding waste at all costs is extremely important to me as a frugal gardener. Throwing away parts of a plant that I might be able to use is akin to throwing money in the trash!

Now is the time of year where I'm in full harvest mode. I also receive a weekly CSA farm basket to satisfy my veggie cravings. I rarely meal plan at this time of year because I need to be able to get creative and think on my toes as I pick what's ripe in my garden and dig into my organic farm basket. Most recipes simply don't use all the parts of a plant, so I need to think outside the box when it's time to cook dinner.

Here are 3 plants that you can eat from top to bottom:

Beets

Sure, you know that you can eat the root portion of this sweet and earthy vegetable, but did you know that the tops are edible, too? Don't toss them out! After harvesting, separate

the tops from the roots and wash both parts of the plant thoroughly to remove dirt. Beet greens are very similar to swiss chard and taste great sauteed.

Carrots

They're not particularly flavorful, but the tops of your carrot plants are definitely edible. Use them to make carrot pesto or as a garnish for heavy dishes. In the late fall, you can harvest the tops of mature carrots before the roots, since the tops are a lot less cold hardy.

Kohlrabi

An alien-looking root vegetable that has a mild turnip-like flavor. I much prefer kohlrabi to turnips, actually! The bulb can be shredded and used raw in a salad or cubed and roasted with other root veggies. The leaves are fair game, too. Cook them together or separately, or use them like you would cabbage leaves and stuff them with whatever you're in the mood for.

Plants you *can't* eat from top to bottom:

Oh how I wish I could eat every plant from root to stem, but not all plants are wholly edible. Only eat the fruit of **tomato** plants, the rest might make you sick. Don't bother eating **squash** foliage, it's not at all tasty. Avoid eating **rhubarb** leaves, they're poisonous!

Do you have a favorite unconventional plant part that you love to cook with? Let me know by leaving a comment!