



Garden Tips & Techniques: Winterizing

There's no denying it – winter is approaching! Days are shorter and cooler; the richly colored trees have started to drop their leaves. By now, some of your garden plants may have succumbed to frost damage. Here's a basic overview of what to take care of in the garden, before winter arrives.

1. *Make a sketch!* Though your garden may seem unforgettable at this juncture, it is amazing what a winter season can erase (from memory as well as from the garden)! Take the opportunity to make a record of what was planted where. If you have time, include notes about crops or varieties that did well or were lacking. If you had problems with diseases or pests, write down those details as well. These notes will help with your seed order or seedling selection for next year!
2. *Remove non-producing, annual plants.* Most vegetables and some herbs are annual, meaning they only live one year in this climate. For instance, if your peppers have been hit hard with frost, and the fruits squish when you touch them...it's time to pull out the plants. They won't produce any more this year, and the winter will completely kill them. If the plants you pull are free from pests and disease, it's fine to place them in your compost. Otherwise, make a separate compost pile you don't intend to use on the garden, in order to keep from spreading pests and disease.
3. *Clean up your perennials.* Some herbs and fruits like raspberries and strawberries are perennial, meaning they will go dormant over the winter and grow again next spring. Prune off any dead areas and add a couple inches of mulch underneath your plants. Be careful not to prune excessively or fertilize your plants, as these both encourage rapid, tender growth. This new growth is vulnerable in the winter and may die, stressing or killing the whole plant.
4. *Cover sensitive plants or bring them inside.* Some crops like figs will usually survive the winter if they are bundled in straw and burlap. Other sensitive perennials like rosemary and chard may overwinter (depending on the severity of the weather) if they are heavily mulched. Or, pot up small plants and bring them inside to a South or West facing window. Keep these potted plants somewhat dry, as they will go dormant in the low light of winter. As the days grow longer, begin watering normally.
5. *Rake up debris.* Rake up any fallen leaves or fruits and vegetables from the plants you've removed. This important step helps to keep pests and disease from overwintering in the soil.
6. *Source some mulch and cover bare soil.* Soil is the foundation of the garden, and organic gardening relies on "building soil" by adding compost and amendments year after year. It can be painstaking and hard work to build soil in urban areas where there may not be much organic matter available on site. So keeping that soil from eroding is paramount! Cover bare areas in the garden with several inches of straw or dried leaves, to protect your investment in the soil from washing away.
7. *Consider cover crops.* Cover crops are living mulches: crops that are grown for their ability to hold the soil in place and then be turned in to the earth to add nutrition. This time of year, only a few cover

crops can be planted, and they are perennial varieties – they will not die over the winter. Because of this, only plant these cover crops if you have a good plan for tilling them back into the soil, come spring. It can be quite frustrating to have to contend with a thick, lush bed of rye where you want to plant peas! If you are planning to plant cover crop in some areas and not others, choose places where you will put later-season crops, like tomatoes or cucumbers, so you have time to transition from cover crop to vegetable crop. Good cover crops to plant now, **if you have a plan to manage them in the spring** (since they will survive the winter), are rye and clover.

8. *Leave a space for garlic.* If you'd like to plant garlic in your garden, leave an area temporarily bare. Garlic growth relies on a winter dormant period. It should be planted in November or early December – before the ground freezes, and it will be ready to harvest in June-July, next summer.