

FALL CLEAN UP

Before putting all your gardening tools away for the year, take an afternoon this fall and clean up the vegetable garden. Removing garden debris, including dead plant material and rotted vegetables, will help to reduce disease and insect problems next year. The time spent now cleaning up the garden, will be well worth it next summer.

Before beginning your garden clean up, sit down and make notes of this year's garden layout and what did or didn't work. This will make planning a rotation schedule for next year's garden easier. Also note particular insect or disease problems encountered this year and which vegetable cultivars you tried.

Next, tomato cages, stakes, trellises and other support materials should be pulled out of the garden, cleaned and placed in storage for winter.

Remove from the garden any plants that have had insect or disease problems. Also collect any fall fruits or vegetables, including dried up "mummies." Many insects overwinter in the garden in last season's dead plant material. Similarly, diseased plant material remaining in the garden will serve as a source of fungal spores to re-infect next year's vegetables. **Don't add these to the compost pile.** Compost piles usually will not reach a high enough temperature to kill all pathogens, like fungal spores or bacteria. Instead discard or burn these plant residues.

Crop residues from healthy plants, such as roots, leaves and stems, are a valuable source of organic matter, and will break down to improve the texture of garden soil. Plants that have not had pest problems can be cut up and put in the compost pile, or turned into the soil for added organic matter. Organic mulches, such as straw or grass clippings, can also be tilled into the soil.

The leaves from your trees also are an excellent source of organic matter for the vegetable garden. After raking the leaves, scatter them over the vegetable garden and till them in. You can also use your mower to remove the leaves from your lawn and then add them to the vegetable garden. Since mowing chops the leaves into smaller pieces, they will break down faster once added to the soil of your vegetable garden.

Daphne