

Timely fall garden activities

Our growing season in 2021 has come to a rather cool, abrupt end after a scorching summer.

It has been a number of years since we last had over two inches of rain in September and high temps in the low 60s for much of the last few weeks of September and early October.

This early onset of fall tends to finish off the warm season vegetables and make many of our fall garden activities more urgent.

The first activity on my fall gardening list is to finish harvesting any vegetables from my garden so I can take out any remaining plants and incorporate them into my compost pile.

Then I spread some lime on the soil, about 50 pounds per one thousand square feet of area. I work the lime into the soil lightly with a heavy steel rake. You can till the area lightly with a rototiller if you like to work in the lime. After raking or tilling in the lime spread some cover crop seed over the bare soil.

This cover crop seed will germinate within a week if you keep the top soil moist with daily light sprinkling. The cover crop seed can be purchased at any of our local farm stores. It is usually packaged in 5 pound bags that have a mixture of legumes and grain seeds. Annual rye grass, wheat, barley, clover, and vetch are some of the types of seeds you will find in the cover crop mixes.

The cover crop will protect the soil from compaction from winter rains and improve the tilth and fertility of your garden when incorporated in spring. You may also wish to add compost to your garden soil to increase organic matter content, and biochar which can improve moisture and nutrient holding capacity of the soil.

Next year, use organic mulches around the base of plants to retain moisture. All of these steps will help your vegetable and flower crops tolerate long dry summers like we had this year.

As information about the growing season of 2021 is still fresh in your memory, it is a good time to review how well each flower, vegetable and fruit crop did. Think about the vegetable varieties you planted this year, which vegetables seemed to thrive in the extreme heat and which ones suffered. Think about how well each vegetable crop produced, and whether there were disease or insect pest issues.



Steve Renquist
OSU Extension Horticulture

Get out your seed catalog and circle the ones that did well so you don't forget when it is time to order next year. If you want to order new varieties, look for ones that talk about heat resistance or resistance to bolting (going to seed).

When planning next year's garden, don't forget to rotate your crops within the garden. To help your plants resist insect and disease pest pressure, having a different plant family in each row of your garden each year is an

easy step to a healthier garden.

Remember that peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, and eggplant are all in the same family. The same is true with cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, collards and Brussel sprouts.

Draw a map of this year's garden so you can remember where to plant next season.

Fall is a good time to spread lime and fertilizer on your lawn to help invigorate a strong recovery after the hot dry summer. Just estimate how many square feet your lawn comprises to know how much fertilizer to buy. Commercial lawn fertilizer bags will state how many square feet it will cover. Most bags cover 5,000 square feet.

Use a whirly bird type

fertilizer spreader to improve the uniformity of the fertilizer application.

Fruit trees often need a few dormant sprays during fall and winter. When the trees have dropped at least half of their leaves in the fall and you have a dry weather forecast for 4-5 days, make an application of copper to all of them. There are a number of brand names you may recognize for copper sprays. Nu-Cop, Kocide, Liqui-Cop, Cuprofix, and Bonide liquid copper. Any of them will do.

When making the fall fruit tree sprays make sure to get good coverage over the trunk, limbs and canopy of the tree. These sprays are meant to control fungal cankers and bacterial blights.