



Prepping a garden for autumn

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Crimson clover is a good cover crop. Cover crops help the soil microbes alive during the winter.

Question: I bought a home that has an established garden spot, flower beds and a few fruit trees. This was my first year of managing these spaces, and I've experienced enough success to make me feel like my hard work has paid off. Even though summer is not over yet, I'm thinking ahead to what I should do next.

What should I be doing as this growing season ends? What should I be doing now to ensure success for the next growing season? I want to build on this year's success and would appreciate any advice you can share.

Answer: I'm happy to hear that the first year of managing your new garden areas was successful and rewarding. You are wise to think ahead even though you are in the midst of a busy summer season. There are many tasks you can do now

which will reap great benefits for you later.

For the next month, your first concern should be making sure your plants and trees don't get heat stressed and die due to lack of water. You will especially need to watch out for any plants you have in raised beds or in containers.

The soil surface needs to dry out an inch or so deep before watering. You will want to focus on deep watering, and a soaker hose works well around trees and shrubs. This is a good time to inspect your watering system or hoses to make sure everything is operating properly.

■ Keep up with dead-heading your flowers. This will keep your flower beds attractive and will make room for new blooms.

■ Harvest your vegetables often and pick when small. If you let the vegetables get too large, it



Linda Estep
Ask a Master Gardener

drains the plant of energy and will shorten your harvest season.

■ Gather fallen fruit from underneath your fruit trees. This limits disease and will help control the wasp population.

■ Some of your annuals may be looking a bit shabby by now. Pull up any that are done for the season. Dispose of those that are diseased and put the rest in the compost pile.

A SECOND PLANTING OR COVER CROP?

Some gardeners will garden throughout the autumn/winter season and some will plant a cover crop. If you are going to garden through the next season, make note of the location of each crop, so

you can rotate your crops in the future.

Now is the time to start planting transplants for an autumn harvest, and now is the time to sow seeds for a winter harvest.

If you plan on using any kind of frost protection, like a cold frame or hoop cover, put the framework up before you plant. You can add the covers later as the first frost approaches, which in Roseburg can be as early as Nov. 3.

If you are not going to grow vegetables, at least consider planting a cover crop. Cover crops (also called green manure) are planted in the fall and tilled under in the spring. A cover crop helps the soil because it keeps the soil microbes alive during the winter. A cover crop will also suppress weeds and reduce erosion of the topsoil. The benefits of a cover crop will last about one year, so for the health of your garden soil, planting a cover crop

every year is beneficial.

Before planting, take the time to prepare the soil for whatever will grow next. Loosen any compacted soil. Use a rake or hand tool to aerate and move around the soil on top. This helps your plants take root and receive more nutrients from the soil below.

Add compost to your garden soil. You can buy commercially prepared compost or make your own at home. Many gardeners maintain a compost bin year-round. You can use dried grass clippings, as long as they haven't been treated with herbicides. You can use shredded leaves, straw, wood chips or pine needles.

■ Consider getting your soil tested. This should be done once every 3-5 years at the same time of the year. You can buy a test kit or pay someone else to test your soil.

■ Take the time to

record what has worked well and what has not. This type of record keeping will prove to be of great value in future years. Becoming a great gardener is building upon the success and avoiding the mistakes of this gardening season. Keeping records will help you to achieve this goal.

I hope you have continued success as you enjoy your new home and gardens.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.