Enrich the Soil for Fall Vegetable Garden

Photo from Veggiegardeningtips.com: Fall vegetable garden

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Healthy soil is a vital component of any successful garden. And now is a good time to prepare the soil for a fall garden.

Amendments can be “spent mushroom compost,” compost you have made, worm-castings that you can purchase or produce yourself from household garbage and garden waste, commercial bagged organic fertilizers from your favorite nursery, and cover crops like field peas and buckwheat that you have planted earlier in the summer and will now “turn under.”

These amendments not only provide nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and trace elements, but will significantly improve the texture and structure of your garden soil. This is true whether your soil is predominately clay or sand. Organic matter also helps maintain the pH balance of the soil at a favorable level.

Add at least an inch of compost annually. Till the amendments to a depth of six to eight inches. You can use a spading fork or tiller for this purpose.

Good gardening practices take time and good soil preparation requires sufficient time for the vegetable matter (organic matter) and other amendments to decompose. This ensures that the nutrients in the amendments are available at the time of planting. Their continuing decomposition also provides a slow release source of nutrients throughout the growing season. In a society where instant gratification is the norm, the hard thing to remember is to start four to six weeks ahead of fall planting. A good time to plant a fall garden is around Labor Day; late August though mid September.
If you haven’t tried a fall garden before, you may be pleasantly surprised. Cool season crops require less watering and have less damage from insect pests and disease.

Favorite fall vegetables are broccoli, collards, cabbage, lettuce, arugula, mustards and other greens, turnips, radishes, carrots, onions, strawberries, etc. All will stand a light frost and some will even survive a hard freeze. Some vegetables like onions, carrots and strawberries do not mature until February, March or even later. Shallots bulbs planted in the fall will provide “green onions” all winter and mature bulbs in the late spring; a double bonus. Check your nursery or feed store for plants and seeds.

There are several local sources of mushroom compost, other soil amendments and organic fertilizers. Call your local nursery or garden center. Look in the yellow pages under “Garden Centers” and/or “Nurseries.”: Williams Concrete on Capital Circle South, and Tallahassee Nurseries, also have spent mushroom compost.

Have your soil tested before starting your garden preparation and then once every three years. It will take 3 weeks or more to receive the results of your soil test, depending on the season. Recommendations for correcting deficiencies are included with the results of a soil test. The pH of your soil is particularly important. The ideal pH of vegetable garden soil is between pH 6.5 and pH 7. Soil test containers, and mailers, with complete sampling and shipping instructions, are available at the Leon County Extension Office, 615 Paul Russell Road in Tallahassee, 606-5202. Don’t hesitate to call the office if you have a question. A Master Gardener at the extension office can help you interpret the results and the recommendations when you receive your soil test results.

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