Now is the time to start planning your fall and winter herb garden. You can anticipate harvesting fresh herbs, lettuces, and other salad greens such as kale, red mustard, and tatsoi throughout the winter and early spring months. Your local nursery can give you advice and will have available seed and transplants for the fall and winter garden in late September and early October.

While contemplating the winter herb garden, I cannot help but get excited at the beauty of the late summer garden. It’s at its peak now, beckoning lots of fluttering, buzzing and humming activity. The pineapple sage is in full bloom, boasting red tubular flowers, inviting hummingbirds to sip its nectar. The Mexican tarragon, covered in golden yellow daisy-like flowers, is beckoning butterflies and a wide array of pollinating insects, as are also the lavender-blue blooms of the anise hyssop and African blue basil. Wow! What a sight to behold!
There are many ways of guaranteed success with the winter garden. I would like to share my tried and true methods with you. First of all, the fall and winter garden is a lot easier simply because the temperatures are cooler and there are fewer pests.

As the aforementioned herbs begin to wind down I will amend my soil, with composted chicken manure, which my flock so readily supplies. To this I add my homemade compost. At this stage I like adding some dehydrated lime to keep the pH in check. Herbs and vegetables really need a neutral pH, 6.5 or so. After working all this in, I let the soil rest a bit prior to planting my seeds and transplants. Whether I am starting seeds in flats to transplant or directly sowing them into the garden, I always like to add worm castings to my soil or planting hole. They possess fungicidal properties as well as being a great soil amendment.

I truly enjoy the fall and winter herb garden with its bounty of sweet, succulent lettuces and greens, and the flourishing dill, cilantro, arugula and sorrel. These plants enjoy this time as well. With the cooler temperatures and few pests to contend with, they will happily provide all season long. Every two to three weeks I will fertilize with an organic fertilizer. I prefer using either fish emulsion mixed with water or an organic granular fertilizer, such as Espoma’s ‘Garden-Tone’, which is easily applied as a top dressing with no fear of burning the plants.

Generally speaking, the only pests I experience are aphids. These are easily dealt with by spraying an insecticidal soap or a flush of water from the hose. Occasionally I will see army or cut worms. I remove them by hand, but you may prefer to use a Bacillus thuringiensis (BT) product which you can dust the plants with. BT is really harmless to humans; in fact you can harvest the day of application.

So, now you can sit back and relax, observing your herb garden aflutter and enjoying a refreshing beverage. But you can also start planning your fall and winter herb garden and the wonderful bounty it will provide with very little care. Enjoy!!

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