

## Putting your Veggies to Bed for the Winter

Spring and Summer are now mere memories, we are well into the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness", and many of us are thinking about preparing our gardens for winter...and next summer's crop of wondrous vegetables.

If you ventured into the rewarding world of Square Foot Gardening for the first time this year, you have a surprise in store. There really isn't much to do at all.

Once you remove the strips of wood that made up the squares and stack them somewhere handy, it's simply a matter of pulling out the old dead plants. Shake as much soil as possible off the roots and compost the plant. Be wary, though; any diseased or infested plants should be discarded rather than composted, as there may be insect eggs which will hatch in the spring to reinfest your garden.

With a small garden fork or trowel, turn over the top few inches of soil and remove the surprisingly few weeds that have sprouted under taller plants (but don't compost them). Be sure to leave any parsnips, as they improve in sweetness and flavour when their starch is turned to sugar by frost and cold. Many other veggies such as green onions, leeks, carrots and beets can withstand a frost, and it will actually improve the flavour of most members of the cabbage family.

Many perennial herbs like mint, Greek oregano and chives should be cut back, but can remain in the garden. If you have masses of leafy herbs like parsley or cilantro, be sure to keep them for the long winter months. Remove large stems, dry them in the microwave on layers of paper towel, then crush the leaves and store them in glass jars for adding to soups and stews. Microwaved herbs stay as green and tasty as fresh-picked, and they sure beat store-bought!

One vegetable that you can plant in autumn is garlic, ideally around the second week of October. Use only locally-produced seed garlic that was grown for planting and not for eating, as it will be disease-free and originate in Canada.

Tear down the peas or runner beans that were climbing up your frame and compost them, saving some seeds for planting next year. Only self-pollinating plants such as peppers, beans and peas are suitable for seed-harvesting, and their seeds need no special treatment before storage. I store my seeds in individual labelled envelopes in a dark cupboard, but some folks prefer the refrigerator. My only problem is remembering where I stashed them when it comes time to plant next spring!

Be sure to label each envelope with the name of the plant, the variety, and the date you harvested it. Nothing is worse than being confronted with several envelopes containing little black seeds, with no idea from whence they came! If you do forget where you put

them, and discover them months later, cut your losses and discard them, since the older the seed, the lower the germination rate and vigour.

If you want to mulch the remaining plants, wait until the soil freezes, then add natural mulch like shredded leaves which will decay and enhance the soil. If added too early, mulch can prevent the ground from freezing and killing off any disease or pests lurking there.

Once you have finished cleaning up your Square Foot Gardens, it's time to revisit the charts you made when you planted in the spring. Review what you grew and how well it performed. Was it too tall or bushy, and should it be relocated next year? Did it under-produce and if so, why? Was it spectacularly successful...or unsuccessful? Since my yearly charts are in the computer, I like to highlight in green those varieties that I will definitely replant and in red the ones that I have no intention of ever growing again.

Make notes, if necessary, on what pests or diseases you encountered and research how to combat them next year. Record the details while they are fresh in your mind so they will come in handy when planning your garden next year.

Soon the long dark Canadian winter will be upon us. Memories of insect infestations, droughts and downpours will fade. Now's the time to pore over glorious seed catalogue photos and dream of bushels of red tomatoes, a rainbow of multicoloured peppers...and the joys of vegetable gardening.

Submitted by Beth Tilbury  
Square Foot Gardener