

News Column for Use the Week of August 26, 2024
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Work Garden Soil in the Fall

Fall is right around the corner; with vegetable gardens starting to slow down and coming to a stop; it's time to start thinking about what needs to be done for next year's garden. Fall is the preferred time to prepare garden soil for next spring. Spring is often wet making it difficult to work soil without forming clods that will remain for the rest of the season. Fall usually is drier allowing more time to work the soil. Even if you work soil wet in the fall and form clods, the freezing and thawing that takes place in the winter will break down the clods, leaving a smoother soil for the following spring.

Another reason to work the soil in the fall is to get rid of any insects and diseases you might have had from the previous year. Insects often hide in garden debris. If that debris is worked into the soil, insects will be less likely to survive the winter. Diseases are also less likely to overwinter if old plants are worked under. Garden debris will also increase the organic matter content of the soil.

Fall is an excellent time to add organic matter. Not only are organic materials (leaves, rotten hay or silage, grass clippings) usually more available in the fall but fresher materials can be added in the fall than in the spring because there is more time for them to break down before planting. As a general rule, add 2 inches of organic material to the surface of the soil and till it in. Be careful not to over till the soil. You should end up with particles the size of grape nuts or larger. By working the organic material into the soil you are allowing it to sit there all winter and break down into nutrients that your vegetable plants will need next summer.

By working your garden in the fall you are allowing the soil to rest over the winter and be ready for vegetable plants in the summer. If you have any questions, please contact Kelsey Hatesohl at the Washington Office at 785-325-2121 or at khatesohl@ksu.edu.