



November Tips

VEGETABLES

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- Plowing that leaves the soil bare throughout late fall to early spring can create problems, such as leaching and erosion. It is too late to plant cover crops to hold nutrients in the soil, but mulching could help preserve soil that otherwise might be lost during heavy rainfall.
- An attractive autumn basket can be assembled using various- sized pumpkins and gourds in combination with traditional, dark-green acorn squash and acorn varieties, such as Jersey Golden (gold), White Swan, or Cream of the Crop (white).
- Rhubarb plants that are 4 years old can be divided and transplanted. A site prepared by deep digging and incorporating compost will pay off with a good yield in upcoming years.
- Plant lettuce and hardy vegetables, such as beets, cabbage, and spinach, in cold frames for winter or early spring crops.
- If you've purchased gourds this year as decorations, plan to grow them yourself next year. They make great garden projects for kids.
- Be sure not to store apples or pears with vegetables. The fruits give off ethylene gas which speeds up the breakdown of vegetables and causes them to develop off-flavors.
- Make successive sowings of vegetable crops, such as lettuce and radishes, in the greenhouse. The secret to fresh food all winter is to sow small quantities frequently.
- Dig up a vigorous rhubarb crown now to force stalks later this winter.
- Dead leaf stalks of perennial vegetables, such as asparagus and rhubarb, should be cut to the ground after their tops are killed by frost.
- When time or weather conditions prohibit plowing or cover cropping, you may wish to let your garden lie under a mulch of compost, non-diseased plant wastes, or leaves all winter to be plowed or tilled under in the spring. However, a mulch of heavy materials, such as whole leaves, can become matted and keep the soil cold and wet long enough to delay planting in the spring. If using large or heavy organic matter, chop it fine enough so it can break down over the winter.

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- If you use manure as a soil conditioner, apply it now and till it under. Manure can be a source of weed seed. Composting before application can reduce the number of viable seeds.
- Rough plow or spade garden plots containing heavy, clay soil. Add organic matter and lime if indicated by a soil test. Leave the soil rough -winter's thawing and freezing will break up the clods and kill some of the insects and slugs overwintering in the soil. A rough soil surface also catches more moisture and reduces erosion.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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