

## **WORKING SMARTER, NOT HARDER: OPTIMIZING GARDEN TASKS IN THE FALL**

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Between beautiful photographs shared on social media to fond memories of growing up in backyard gardens and farms, the idea of being the owner of a charming garden has become increasingly popular. The thought of getting the day's daily dose of exercise combined with daydreams of morning coffee or evening beverages surrounded by lush colors of foliage entices people of all skill levels to give gardening a try. And by all means, everyone should give it a good go at least once!

But when push comes to shove and spring finally arrives, the labor and planning involved with starting a garden can seem rather daunting, even to seasoned gardeners.

The way we address this particular obstacle can be found in the wisdom discovered by our farming ancestors who developed a lifestyle around maintaining their crops and gardens. With some year-round elbow grease, taking the time each season to look ahead and accomplish smaller tasks is one of the key components for a healthy garden and even happier gardener.

### **Add Compost To The Soil**

If your garden bed(s) are already constructed and have the appropriate level of soil in them, adding compost is a great way to begin preparations for your spring garden. Over the winter, compost and fertilizers will give your soil a nutritional boost and be ready to help your produce and flowers maximize their growth and output when planted in the spring.

### **Keep Weeding**

If you don't want to be greeted with unwanted vegetation and waste precious time and physical labor cleaning out your garden beds when you could be planting, keep weeding your growing spaces through the fall and early winter months and beginning again in early spring. The fewer weeds that go to seed in your soil means the fewer weeds you will see in the spring. Take a few minutes each day to walk around your yard and pull the few weeds that you see. The long-term investment will save you frustration and time when spring planting finally comes.

### **Mulch**

To help keep weeds down and maintain soil temperatures so that perennials and other overwintering plants stay dormant over the winter, applying a light layer of mulch does the trick. Use your yard clippings and leaves for a cost-efficient solution and additional compost that can continue to benefit your gardening space.

### **Clean, Fix, Mend**

Are your raised bed frames looking worn or cracked? Do your stacked stones or pavers need to be readjusted, expanded, or scaled down? Maybe you don't have your garden bed created yet and need to get the space started before winter comes and the ground gets hard? These are all great tasks to accomplish

before the spring. Instead of waiting until planting time, prep, clean, fix, and mend your gardening spaces and tools during the fall months when you aren't busy gardening. This will help prepare you for the upcoming growing season and ease the financial burden if any tools need to be repaired or replaced. Plus, cleaning gardening tools and containers helps to prevent harmful bacteria, mold, and mildew potentially picked up from the previous year's crops from being transferred to the new crops in the spring.

### **Make Notes And Plan For The Next Season**

Take the time during the fall and winter to research and plan for the upcoming growing season. Want to try out a new type of vegetable or flower? Having trouble growing a plant in a specific area? Take time to look at reputable seed and plant companies and ask questions with your local Extension Home Gardening/Master Gardener Office to find the right solutions for your gardening needs and interests. It may also be wise to invest in keeping a garden notebook—nothing fancy is necessary. A general spiral notebook or composition book does the job well. Using your gardening notebook, you can track what you planted, when you planted, the daily temperature, precipitation, garden layout, etc., before you invest your time, energy, and resources in the following growing season.

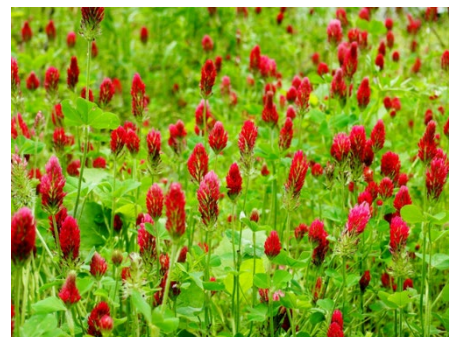
By taking a hint from our gardening forefathers and using fall as the stepping stone into the next growing season, we are able to pace ourselves and plan ahead efficiently to have an effective and successful growing season when spring comes around in the next year.

Gardening can seem incredibly intimidating, especially in the first attempts. Instead of allowing ourselves to be blind-sided year after year, let's vow to work smarter and not harder. Preparing our garden spaces year-round allows us to continue to stay active and aware, while optimizing the extra time we gain by enjoying the fresh produce in our meals or savoring another cup of coffee among our gorgeous flower landscapes.



A sharp shovel will help you keep weeds under control now and make weeding less intensive in the spring. (Photo credit: Robin Sweetser, <https://www.almanac.com/fall-vegetable-garden-cleanup-11-things-do-now>)

A cover crop such as crimson clover can be planted now and then plowed under to help enrich the soil in the spring. (Photo credit: <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/september-tips-and-tasks>)





Loosening your soil and incorporating compost in fall prepares your garden for planting in spring. (Photo credit: <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/soil-compost-and-fertilizer-home-garden>)

The University of Maryland Extension Frederick County's Home Gardening/Master Gardeners Office is now open to the public. You can also find gardening information and advice online at:

- University of MD Extension Home & Garden Information Center, <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmentnatural-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center>;
- Frederick County Master Gardeners Publications, <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>;
- Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>;
- or call us at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596).

*For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.*

*Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>*

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