



How to Clean Up the

EDIBLE GARDEN

in the Fall

Ag *for* Life





How to Clean Up the Edible Garden in the Fall



The days are getting shorter, the chilly nights are settling in, and the leaves are falling from the trees. You've harvested the vegetables, fruits, and herbs from your edible garden and now it's time to put it to bed for the winter. Here are some tasks to accomplish before winter makes its first appearance.

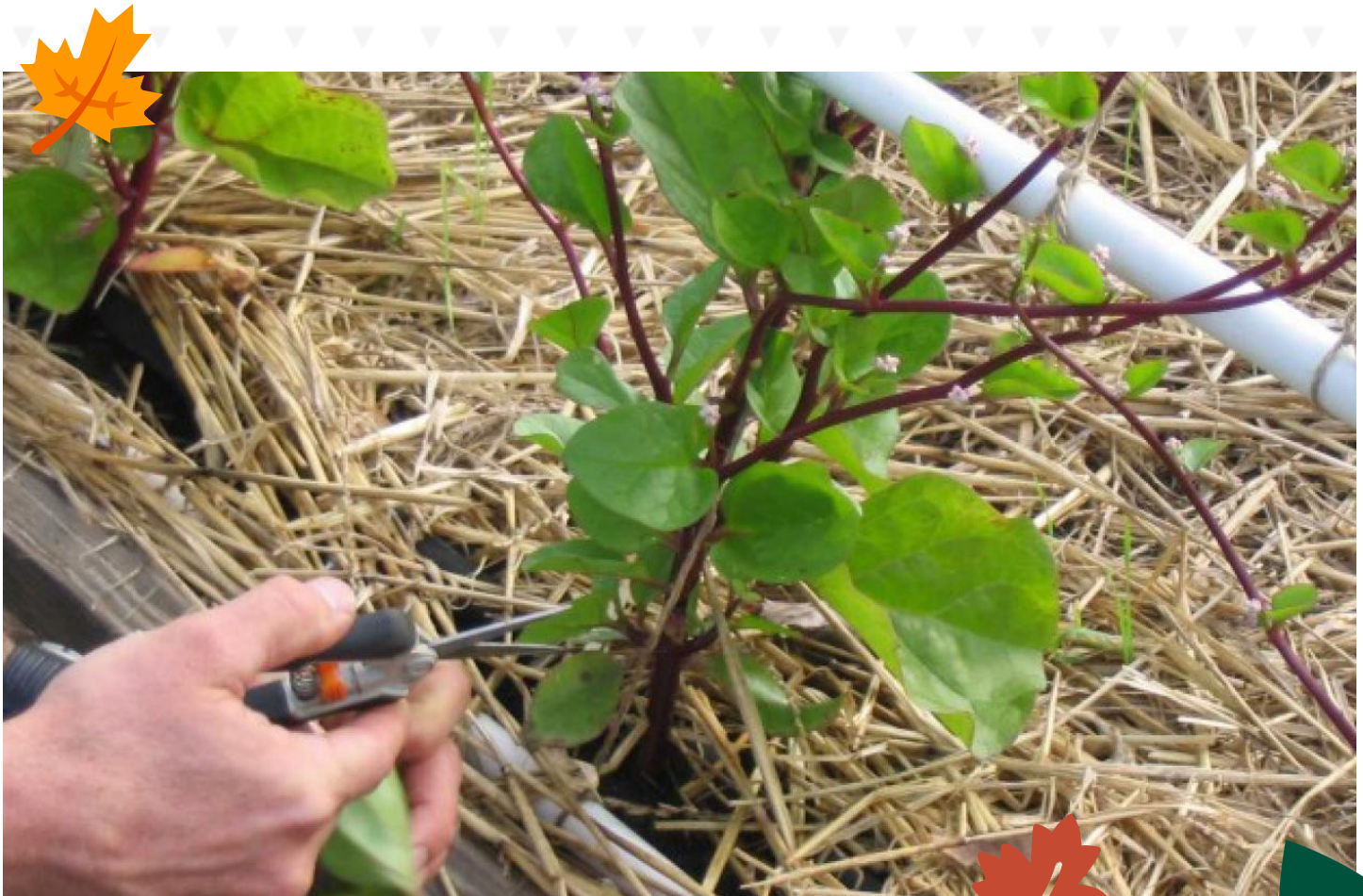




1. Mulch. In some areas, chinooks can expose the soil to the wind during the middle of the winter. Protect the soil from erosion by applying a layer of mulch over your garden beds (including raised beds) in the fall. Weed-free straw or dried shredded leaves are excellent options. If you have fruit trees or shrubs, add a layer of straw or shredded bark mulch beneath them. Do not mulch right up to the trunks as this may promote rot. Mulch should be put down on garden beds after the ground is frozen – this deters voles from hiding under the mulch and creating burrows. They can't dig if the ground is hard with frost!



2. Chop and drop – if you want to. There are two schools of thought regarding this practice. Doing so adds organic matter to the soil but some gardeners worry about providing a safe haven to overwinter pest insects and wildlife such as voles. For gardeners who choose to try it: If you have dried plant matter from legumes such as peas and beans in your garden beds, you can cut it into small pieces (no longer than 5 centimetres or 2 inches) and lay it on top of the soil surface. Ensure you only do this with plants that had no diseases – you don't want to harbour anything in the soil that might cause harm to your plants in the future. The plant matter acts as a natural mulch for the soil, protecting it from erosion. Legume crops have another benefit, however – they can fix nitrogen with the help of specialized bacteria. The bacteria near the roots of the plants can take the nitrogen from the atmosphere and convert it to a form that the plants can use. When you leave the remains of the legumes in the soil, the accumulated nutrients are released and can be taken up by the next crop that is planted. Some gardeners choose to chop and drop all healthy plant material, not just those of legumes. The decision to chop and drop is your choice – try experimenting with it over several years and determine your preference. If you don't add the dried plant matter and fruit litter directly to your garden beds, compost them. Be sure to cut them into small pieces so that the composter can break them down more efficiently.





3. Add compost and soil. Get a leg up on the next growing season by amending your vegetable garden soil with a 2.5 to 5 centimetre (one to two-inch) layer of compost. There is no need to dig the compost in. You can of course do this in the spring, but if you have time to do it in the fall, why not? If you need to add soil to raised or in-ground beds, you can do that in the fall as well – no need to wait until spring.
4. Build compost for next year. If there are trees near your edible garden beds, collect the dry, fallen leaves and use them in your compost bins. Be sure to shred them before adding them to your composter, so that they rapidly decompose.
5. Weed. You may be tempted to leave this task for spring – after all, you just spent the whole growing season weeding – but cleaning up the weeds in the fall ensures that you don't miss any weed seeds that might lie dormant over the winter and spring to life as soon as the soil warms up the following year.





6. Get your garlic in the ground. Autumn is the time to plant hardneck garlic, so that it may be harvested the following summer. Plant cloves in compost-amended garden beds just before the ground freezes up. (Don't do it too early or it will start to grow before winter settles in). Mulch your garlic beds with a layer of clean, weed-free straw.



7. If you've grown herbs such as rosemary and basil in containers over the summer, you can bring them indoors for the winter. Acclimatize them to their winter home by bringing them inside overnight over the course of a week or two, leaving them outside during warm days. After this time frame, they should be ready to stay inside. Use sticky tape traps (available at most garden centres) to deal with fungus gnats, if they appear. Rosemary, in particular, benefits from regular misting with water when situated indoors – they don't tolerate low humidity.

8. Dream and plan. As you clean up your edible garden for the winter, think about its successes and failures over the past growing season. Are there things you were extremely satisfied with? What about other things that perhaps need changing? This is the time to think about how to improve your edible garden for next year and enjoy the (literal) fruits of your labour!



