

tip sheet: **Top 10 Things To Do to Prepare the School Garden for Winter and Seasons Ahead**

Introduction

The end of the gardening season is an important time to prepare for the next season. Efforts made at this time will prepare the garden for the harsh winter season ahead and put your school garden in a great position to get a good start on the spring season to follow. Below are the Top 10 things to do to prepare the garden for winter.

1. Clear all Dead and Decayed Plant Matter – It is important to clear away all dead and decayed plant material from the garden beds. Incorporate this material into your compost pile. Plant tissue may harbor disease and so it is advised that this material is removed, roots and all, and decomposed via the composting process.

2. Test the Soil – Take several samples of soil from different locations around your school garden and send out for a nutrient analysis. This will help inform your rotation of plants and/or the amendments you may need to order over the winter and incorporate into the soil in the following growing season.

3. Top Dress Planting Beds with Compost – Top dressing the garden beds with a layer of compost is a smart way to add organic matter to improve the soil structure of your garden. Spread a 1" layer of compost prior to mulching the garden and after dead and decayed plant matter has been cleared from the garden.

4. Plant Ornamental and Edible Bulbs –

Ornamental bulbs, such as tulips, daffodils, alliums, and hyacinths and edible bulbs, such as garlic, are planted in the fall at the end of the growing season and before the ground freezes. Flowering bulbs provide a nice jolt of color to the early spring season. Be sure to label the plantings and save room for planting cool season crops in the spring.

5. Cover Crops – Planting cover crops in the fall is a great way to improve the health of your garden soil AND prevent erosion. Cover crops include clovers, wheat, rye, vetches, and alfalfa. Nutrients in the biomass of most cover crops are released into the soil when the crop is turned over in the spring. Legumes, release nitrogen into the soil while they're growing. The roots of cover crops help to keep soil particles in place despite the harsh, drying winds of winter.

6. Divide Perennials – Take this seasonal opportunity to divide mature perennials. Removing and dividing herbaceous perennials, such as ornamental grasses, yields multiples that can be planted elsewhere in the garden, sold to help with fundraising efforts. This is also an easy way to investigate different strategies of propagation.

7. Mulch – Mulch is used as a barrier to the sun and wind and helps to suppress weeds and limit soil erosion. Many different materials qualify as mulch: straw and salt hay, wood chips, grass clippings, tree leaves, etc. We recommend visiting your local plant nursery to find out what is in stock. Apply mulch as a top dress to the surface of your planting beds, particularly in beds with exposed soil.



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8. Inventory Tools – While breaking the garden down, clean and take stock of the collection of tools. Be sure to inspect for damage and set any aside that may be a safety hazard. Generate lists of the tools that are in good order and a list of tools to replace or repair.

9. Evaluate – This is a good time to evaluate plant performance and poll teachers and other stakeholders for feedback. Solicit input and collect this information to review as plans are made for the upcoming season's programming and seed orders.

10. Volunteer and Donor Appreciation – Be sure to thank all your volunteers and donors. Both likely helped you accomplish a lot and are likely to continue their support especially if they are reminded that their efforts are appreciated and well worth it!