

The autumn garden - winding down and planning ahead

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When frost chills the air and leaves begin to glow, gardeners usually resign themselves to clean-up and harvest preservation. However, autumn is an ideal time to put creativity to work, both to extend this growing season and for a head start on the next.

Cold frames and hoop houses are easy to construct (layers of plastic supported by lightweight frames), and act like mini-greenhouses. They capture warm air while still allowing light to reach plants and soil. Protected crops can be enjoyed well into winter. If used in late summer, a second harvest can be had from cold frames employed to shelter new plantings of lettuce, broccoli, spinach and other cool weather crops.

Garlic is classically planted in autumn. As with many bulbs, a period of cold dormancy is required to grow good garlic. When choosing seeds, select the best bulbs - large and firm with thick layers of papery skin. Separate each bulb, taking care not to split the cloves. Till a generous amount of mature compost into the soil. Plant cloves with the narrow tapered end up approximately twice as deep as the size of the clove, spacing 8 inches (20 cm) apart.

In a similar fashion, ongoing and early harvests can be assured by planting some vegetables right now. Potatoes, if planted with rich compost and covered in a thick layer of mulch, can overwinter and produce much earlier next spring. Right now, trim the tops off of beets, carrots, parsnips and turnips

still in the soil, cover with a tarp and then thick layers of mulch or bags of leaves. Such insulation will prevent the soil from freezing, and the tarp makes it easy to lift the mulch and snow. Some gardeners recommend similar storage, in deep, insulated trenches, for onions, cabbage, and other vegetables, allowing for freshly harvested vegetables all winter long.

Seed crops should be harvested soon, if they have not already been. Any beans, peas, or other seeds left to mature and dry should be brought indoors, cleaned, dried, and stored carefully for next year. Consider setting aside some seeds when cooking tomatoes, peppers, and squash, as well.

Bulbs meant to overwinter outdoors should be planted in early autumn; they must be well planted, mulched, and insulated from the cold. Now is the time to plant roses, asparagus crowns, and even fruit trees if you want to save effort next spring. Berry bushes can be pruned by cutting out old, dry canes. Fruit trees should be pruned only after they are fully dormant; wait at least until the leaves drop.

Perhaps most importantly, gardeners intending to start or expand gardens next year can save a lot of time and energy by starting this autumn. The 'lasagna gardening' method popularized by Patricia Lanza takes much of the effort out of installing and maintaining a garden. In brief, Lanza recommends outlining the area you plan to cultivate, and then covering this area with thick layers of wet newspaper. No tilling or grass killing is required



Garlic, planted in autumn, is one of the first plants to sprout in early spring.



Garlic cloves used for seed should be well dried, large and firm, with no signs of damage or decomposition. - just pile on whole sections of newspaper, followed by alternating layers of leaves, compost, grass clippings, and other organic materials. For small plants or flowers, the pile need only be 6-8 inches (15-20 cm) tall; for larger plants and perennials, a



The autumn garden might seem deceptively devoid of activity, but many simple projects can help gardeners enjoy extended harvests now and less work next growing season. minimum of 1 foot (30 cm) is advised. Cover the entire pile with a solid layer of black plastic, weight it down with rocks or stakes, and wait. In



Covering the surface each autumn with heavy layers of compost and mulch (grass clippings, leaves, etc.) can enhance garden soil without much extra effort or expense.

the spring, most of the material will be broken down, thanks to the help of worms and other microbes. Plant directly into the beds, and

enjoy your garden knowing you successfully enlisted natural processes to reduce your workload.

Know your region

BILL COX

Having lived in this beautiful area for a little over eleven years now, there are not many places I do not know. Whenever visitors inquire about a certain address, village or tourist attraction, I am amazed at how much I know. This knowledge comes from an inborn curiosity and being an enthusiastic photographer and walker who enjoys cycling.

For many years now, since the children are away on their own, I have developed the habit of combining exercise and recreation with learning local geography and lore. I will often take the car and drive to other parts of town, and walk from that point. At a walking pace on a sunny afternoon, or a summer evening, one can get an intimate knowledge of the streets and a feeling of the neighborhood.

I go out of my way to ask questions, resulting in some very interesting conversations with people

about their part of town. It could be with the gentleman on his lawn, leaning on a rake, or with that very informative lady who left her flower bed to enthusiastically describe her parish. I find people want to help when politely approached.

The same applies to cycling. I put the bicycle on the car rack and head for another town or village. I usually park in a church yard after asking for permission if anyone is around. I start with a tour of the village then head to the outskirts, usually on country roads, and enjoy the scenery. Here again I may stop to question a local resident about some point of interest.

I make it a point to thank someone at the church for letting me park the car, and I usually have a question to ask the locals. At one town I was treated to a private tour of the 150-year-old church, including mention of its resurrection after a fire and the generosity of the parishioners.

During the winter months, I am

less adventurous, but I will bundle up warmly for the occasional walk. When it is cold outside, I find fewer people to question. Often at a café stop for a hot chocolate, the neighbour at the next table may answer a question that will get a conversation going.

Skating on the different outdoor rinks throughout town can be exhilarating, and here again you have occasion to learn something new. Have you tried the skating path on the St. Charles River or the Gaétan Boucher ice oval? These rinks, where many of our future NHL players begin to play hockey, can be found all over Quebec City and the surrounding region. Some towns will flood pathways to make interesting ice-skating surfaces with a view, and even tennis courts are used for skating rinks.

The attractions offered by our town suit all tastes and interests. A walk with guests often includes old Quebec with its architecture from another era, quaint cafés with side-

walk terraces and a variety of street performers. From many points in old Quebec, one will get a glimpse of our mighty St. Lawrence River. A walk along the waterfront can be pleasantly educational - consider the opportunities, like learning about the old Canada customs office on Dalhousie Street where boats once came right up to the steps of the building to report imported cargo. Whenever I see a poster explaining the history of a site I will stop to read it, or photograph it to read at home.

Visiting your area can be very enriching, and will reward you with the satisfaction of meeting wonderful people who are eager to help you learn about their town. It may even incite you to sing a few lines of Louis Armstrong's "It's a wonderful world," and mean it.



Outside the city, countless kiosques offer locally grown a taste of autumn. Réjean Trottier operates a popular roadside orchard, garden, and brick-oven bakery near St-Anne-de-la-Pérade.