

## **WINTER GARDENING GUIDE:**

### **Preparing Vegetables and Flowers for the Coming Cold and Beyond**

Article & Photo by Rhonda Kraft, Rockwall County Extension Master Gardener

**Winter isn't a time to abandon the garden** — it's a time to protect, prepare, and plan. With a few smart steps, you can shield your plants from frost, enrich your soil, and set the stage for a vibrant spring bloom and productive vegetable crop.

**Protect What's Already Growing** - Mulch and Insulate. Start by adding a thick layer (2–4 inches) of a good quality organic mulch around the base of perennials, garlic, and overwintering veggies like kale or spinach. Mulch helps regulate soil temperature and prevents freeze-thaw cycles that can damage roots.

**Move Containers** – If you have plants in pots, group them close together in a sheltered area, like against a south-facing wall, and prepare to insulate them with frost cloths. If there are plants you adore, you might consider taking cuttings and bring them inside to overwinter just in case the winter freeze is too severe.

**Protect your crops from critters and insects** - Raised beds are good to help keep some critters away. Use net row covers to help deter insects such as moths, which lay eggs under the leaves and out of sight. If your beds are in ground or low raised beds, rabbit fencing and net row protectors work well. Provide bird feeders and water sources throughout your garden. Birds help with pest control year-round and need our help to survive the winter.

**Plan ahead for frost cloths** - just in case you need them. Most winters I have found a need to protect from a hard freeze at least once during the season. Purchase frost cloths in various sizes based on the beds you will be protecting. Stakes are good to hold the cloths up off the plants when necessary and stones can help anchor the cloths. If the freeze is only during the night, I pull the cloths back during the day as the temperature allows and cover them again if needed through the next night. Once we get past the threat of a freeze, the cloths can be stored for future use.

**Prep Beds and Soil for Spring** - Remove dead plant material and spent annuals to reduce pests and diseases. Compost healthy debris but discard anything with signs of mildew or blight. Spread a layer of organic compost over beds now; it'll break down and enrich the soil by spring. Winter is also a good time to test soil pH and nutrients so you can amend early.

Visit <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu> for more information on soil testing.

**Time to Plan and Prep** - Winter is ideal for cleaning, sharpening, and oiling your tools so they're ready for the new season. You can also use this time to plan for any changes to your garden layout. Think about areas you want to create a new bed or make adjustments to existing areas.

**There is joy to be found in a winter garden**- if you know where to look. A great way to enjoy some additional seasonal color, especially through the winter is to incorporate frost hearty flowers into

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your beds. If you are planting near vegetables, be sure the flower species is a good companion for the type of vegetable you are growing. Of the many flowers that can be grown throughout the winter, Pansies, Camellias, and Dianthus are considered edible. If growing among your vegetable crops, do some research before making your selection. A thriving spring garden starts in winter. With protection, preparation, and a little planning, your veggies and flowers will thank you come warmer days.

**Save the Date! National Seed Swap Day 2026** As you wind down your fall gardens and look forward to all that winter has to offer, now is the time to harvest and save seeds from a few of your garden favorites. Make plans to join in the fun with Rockwall County Master Gardeners on National Seed Swap Day, Saturday, January 31, 2026 from 10am to noon in the large meeting room at the Rockwall County Library. You never know what amazing seeds you might go home with! Learn more at [txmg.org/rockwall/](https://txmg.org/rockwall/) and #rockwalltxseedswap on Facebook.