

Bell County Master Gardener's
Tip of the Week

By David A. Fitch

"Fall Vegetable Gardens"

The summer intense heat is certainly here, and it is now time to put your vegetable garden beds to rest. As soon as the last of those peppers, black-eyed peas, and melons have matured, the time is right to begin to make plans for the fall garden. There is always the temptation to get those last few beans or to coax a few more tomatoes along. You will just have to get brutal and start pulling out the dead stuff.

An important part of any garden planning process is to make the beds ready for the next planting. Keeping in mind the importance of maintaining a strong viable micro-organism community in the soil, this would be an excellent opportunity to consider appropriate soil amendments. Remember, most cool season crops are heavy feeders! I like to use a mixture of composted chicken manure and composted cotton burrs. One bag of each, mixed thoroughly and spread on the bed is a good way to add nutrients and organisms to the fall garden. To promote water dispersion, you can put down a layer of decomposed granite or expanded shale. Gently rake the compost and the aggregate into the top four to six inches of soil. Then cover the beds with a layer of compost from your compost bins. If you don't have compost bins, you can add layers of grass clippings from your lawn. The compost or grass clippings will provide food for your micro-organisms growing in the soil. Water this in thoroughly several times and let the beds rest until you plant in September.

For the gardening novice in Texas, here are a few things to consider. Bush beans are considered a warm season crop, but they can be planted in late August or early September to mature in October or November. Consider selecting some cool season plants such as sugar snap peas, beets, carrots, onions, lettuce, spinach, kale, cauliflower and many others. There are many varieties of these to choose and grow. You can also plant several varieties of herbs in the fall. Some annuals to brighten the garden are also available.

The Bell County Master Gardeners Association will be offering a class on Fall Vegetable Gardening on **August 10th from 7 to 9 PM at the Bell County Extension Office**. Call the Bell County Extension Office in Belton to reserve a space for this informative class. Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com