

CityBites

TORONTO'S GUIDE TO GREAT FOOD & DRINK

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Fall 2010

Celebrating
5 Years!



CATERING
WHAT YOU NEED
TO KNOW FOR
THE HOLIDAYS

GET SHARP
WITH OUR
KNIFE GUIDE

THE QUEST FOR

PERFECT PIZZA

Queen
Margherita
Pizza

PLUS! MUSTARD + APPLE PIE + BOOKS + KITCHEN STUFF

It's Bedtime!

A COZY WINTER IN THE GARDEN

Like a child at bedtime, here we go, kicking and screaming into the cold and dark of another winter. Who can blame us? Gardeners live for spring planting, summer tending and fall harvesting.

However, the garden's slumber must be endured, and putting the soil to bed for the winter—comfy and cozy—plays an important role in maintaining a healthy northern-climate garden.

The best time to winterize is right after harvest, when your plants are no longer supporting fruit or vegetable growth. This usually occurs at different times in different areas of the garden. In a perfect world, you would winterize the soil in bits and pieces, as the finished plants are pulled out. It is, however, more expedient and perfectly acceptable to prepare the entire garden at once.

Start by removing harvested plants. Remove the roots as well—disease and non-beneficial insects can lay low over the winter in this organic matter and damage the new crop the following spring.

If you compost, the pulled plants can go straight onto the pile. If you don't, start now. Decaying plants make an excellent foundation for a new compost heap. Remember though, good compost needs a mix of both moist green matter (high in nitrogen) as well as dry brown elements (high in carbon). So make sure you add roughly equal amounts of greens and organic browns such as dried leaves, dried grass clippings, sawdust and straw to your compost pile.

Once the plants are out, amend the soil

by adding organic compost, organic manure, worm castings or a mixture of all three. Don't wait until spring—give your soil a nutritional boost right after the demanding growing season. A two-inch layer, turned in to a depth of about six inches, will do the trick.

Although next year's garlic is best planted in mid to late September, you may still have success if you plant right now, especially in light of Toronto's recently mild winters.

GARLIC PLANTING IS SIMPLE AND WORKS LIKE THIS:

1. Separate the cloves from the bulb right before planting.
2. Plant each clove, pointy end up, about two inches from the surface.
3. Spacing the cloves six inches apart yields nice-sized heads.

As long as the cloves have enough warm weather for the roots to set and a short sprout to appear—say three weeks before the ground starts to freeze—then you should see very early growth next spring.

The final step in bedding down your garden is to establish a blanket over the soil. This

OF COMPOST AND DEAD GRASS

Compost needs equal amounts of green and brown organic material, as well as moisture and air. Add water until the compost heap has the consistency of a damp sponge, and use a pitchfork to turn and aerate the pile. Before adding your pulled plants, remove the fully composted bottom layer and use it to amend your soil.

Straw bales are packed very densely. You can cover about 80 square feet to a depth of about four inches with just one bale. Don't be surprised to see a few pieces of grass popping up next spring—straw does contain the odd seed. Hay, on the other hand, is full of seeds. Unless you plan on growing loads of rye, wheat or barley, do not use hay!

prevents sun-bleached soil—yes, even the winter sun is strong—and greatly reduces weed infestations next spring.

Straw makes an excellent winter cover. It's cheap, ubiquitous and looks great dusted about the yard. Apply a four- or five-inch layer over the bed and secure it by running string across the top. It makes excellent insulation for garlic. In the spring, when you pull the straw off, you have instant browns for your compost, and the pieces left in the soil will just decompose and nourish your plants. **CB**

Marc and Arlene Hazzan Green of The Backyard Urban Farm Company (bufco.ca) design, install and maintain organic vegetable gardens.



A cozy blanket of hay makes a nice bed.

PHOTO: MARC GREEN

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