

## SEPTEMBER: Extending Your Garden Season

So, you made a great plan, worked hard to plant and tend to your fall garden, have been enjoying your harvest... and now cold weather is coming! What do you do to make sure your fruits and veggies you want to continue to harvest do not freeze? What you *don't* need to do is worry, because you can make a plan for extending the harvest of your garden using a few light-weight covers and perhaps some easy-to-assemble frames to guard against the frost!

As colder weather sets in, you can begin to protect your edibles for a while by covering them with old sheets or bedspreads on cold nights. But the declining light and chilly daytime temperatures will naturally bring plant growth to a halt. So, as winter approaches you need to prepare for protecting your garden from frost (temperatures below 32 degrees F). Find out when frost typically happens in your area:

<http://www.almanac.com/gardening/frostdates>. Check out the tips below to help create your plan of attack!

- The plants should be mulched, but pull the mulch back from the root of the plants. Mulch helps retain moisture, which helps plants stay warm.
- Use row covers (small hoops with fabric) to protect tender vegetables.
- Cover other plants with insulators including newspapers, straw, old sheets and bedspreads, or evergreen branches. *Avoid plastic covers* and use cloth sheets instead. Cover the whole plant since you want to retain heat picked up during the day.
- Try to have the covers in place well before sunset. Drape loosely to allow for air circulation. Before you cover the plants in late afternoon or early evening, water your plants lightly.
- Remove the covers by mid-morning.



### Try your hand at building some weather-protective structures (some are easy)! Some suggestions:

**Floating row covers:** Floating row covers are made of spun polyester and look like fabric. They are laid over plants and are permeable to light, water, and air. They keep covered plants five to ten degrees warmer than uncovered plants and provide frost protection to temperatures as low as 28°F (image above).

**Cold frames:** A cold frame is simply a bottomless box placed over the plants. They are simple, easy-to-make structures that can be used year-round. Be careful, cold frames overheat easily so be sure to open it when it is a warmer day. They are great places to grow salad crops such as lettuce, radishes, and spinach before and after their regular outdoor planting season.

**Hoop houses:** Hoop houses are similar to cold frames, but bigger! Metal or plastic pipes are bent into a series of hoops that are stuck into the ground or attached to raised beds. The hoops are covered with four to six mm plastic (bury plastic into earth at bottom). Hoop houses can extend the growing season by an additional six to eight weeks! But like cold frames, hoop houses need to be ventilated on warm days.

**Cloches and hot caps:** Cloches and hot caps frequently are used for tomatoes and peppers. They can add three to four weeks to the growing season. There are many variations on cloches, but generally they are any transparent (not opaque) structure that covers a single plant (e.g., a water wall or a clear juice jug with the bottom cut out). Hot caps tend to be conical in shape. Like cold frames and hoop houses, cloches and hot caps should be ventilated to allow hot air to escape on sunny days

Adapted from: <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/2752e/> & <http://hort.uwex.edu/articles/extending-garden-season/>



## SEPTEMBER: Winterizing Your Garden

During winter, when your garden is sleeping, it can be preparing for next spring's planting! Give your garden a head start by taking these important steps to **winterize** your edible garden!

### VEGETABLES:

- Pull up tomato, squash, pea, and bean plants. If they're disease-free, compost them. If any are diseased, either burn them or discard separately. Pull up and put away the stakes. You can leave carrots, garlic, horseradish, leeks, parsnips, radishes, and turnips in the garden for harvesting through early winter.
- Before the ground gets too hard, remove all weeds and debris (stems, roots, leaves).
- Gently till (turn over) the soil to expose any insects who plan to overwinter; this will reduce pest troubles in the spring and your garden site will be ready come spring!
- Once most of the garden soil is exposed, add a layer of compost, leaves, manure (if you have it). Gently till into the soil.
- Protect your garden soil from weeds and help it retain moisture by spreading a thick layer of grass clippings, compost, salt marsh hay, or other organic material over your garden bed.
- If some areas have hopelessly gone to weeds, cover them with black plastic and leave it in place over the winter and into the spring to kill sprouting seeds.



### HERBS (remember to cut and dry some before the first frost, use the dried herbs all winter!):

- Sage (photo to the right) is a perennial in most areas and does not need special treatment for the winter.
- Thyme, oregano, and mint are fairly indestructible perennials, they will go dormant after a few freezes, then revive by themselves in the spring.
- Parsley, a biennial, will withstand a light frost. In Zone 5 or colder, cover it on cold nights.
- Chives are hardy perennials. Dig up a clump and pot it, then let the foliage die down and freeze for several weeks. Bring the pot indoors to a sunny, cool spot. Water well and harvest chives throughout the winter! Or, leave them outside and they will come back in the spring.



### PREPARING BERRY PATCHES FOR THE WINTER:

- In early to mid-fall, prune summer-bearing raspberries, leaving six of the strongest brown canes for every 1 foot of your row.
- Prune fall-bearing raspberries ruthlessly, moving them to the ground after they have borne fruit. New canes will come up in the spring.
- Plant blackberries in the fall and mound up the soil around the canes to prevent hard frosts from heaving them out of the ground.
- Cover strawberry beds with straw or hay.

Adapted from: <http://www.almanac.com/content/preparing-your-garden-winter> & <http://www.motherearthliving.com/In-the-Garden/snow-garden-growing-herbs-in-winter> & <https://www.livingthenourishedlife.com/5-steps-to-winterize-your-vegetable/>

