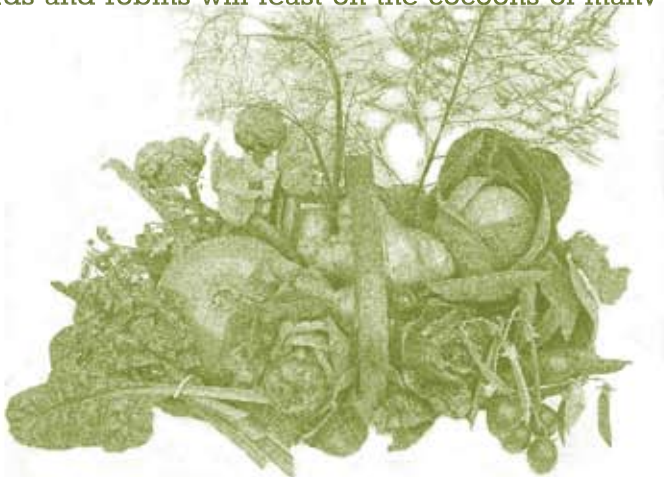


REMOVE MULCHES

During the growing season, many crops, especially fruit, benefit from being mulched. This conserves moisture and reduces weed competition. During Autumn clearing, these mulches should be removed and the soil gently forked over to expose any pests, like raspberry beetle, which will damage next year's crop. Again, straw from round strawberries should be removed and composted, thereby removing shelter for slugs and a breeding ground for diseases. Mulches should be put round the bushes in the early Spring, and straw round strawberries at flowering. Autumn clearing will help ensure healthy growing conditions for next year's fruit and veg. Mulches provide shelter for pests like slugs so you can help clean up the soil by removing them at the end of the growing season. Leave the soil bare over the Winter and blackbirds and robins will feast on the cocoons of many of these pests.



To see examples of all these techniques and a wide range of organically grown plants visit

the ASK Organic Garden

a half acre garden within Woodside Walled Garden, situated 4 miles north of Jedburgh, east of the A68 on the B6400.

The ASK Organic Garden is open 7 days a week March to October 10am to 5pm. Someone from ASK is usually on hand to answer questions on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays between 11am and 4pm.

Produced for the ASK Organic Garden Club by ASK Organic, Wolfhopelee, Bonchester Bridge, Hawick. TD9 9TP. Telephone 01450 860291 and 860778. email da@askorganic.co.uk.

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HOME GROWN:

the organic way



Autumn Tasks

As the growing season comes to an end, we start to look forward to next Spring and how we can start preparing the garden for next year. This involves conserving soil nutrients and taking steps to reduce pests.



PROTECTING SOIL NUTRIENTS

When, after harvesting, the soil is left bare over the Winter, snow and rains will wash away precious nutrients. Growing green manures prevents this from happening. These plants absorb nutrients and, when the crop is dug in the following Spring, these nutrients return to the soil. The most effective green manure for overwintering protection is Hungarian Grazing Rye. It should be sown in the Borders by mid September if it is to grow fully, but will germinate and give some cover if sown till the end of September. It should grow to around 30cm and, when cut down before digging in, looks like straw. This provides good bulk so is ideal for either clay or thin soil. It exudes an allelopathic chemical to prevent other seeds from germinating, so it should be dug in 4 weeks before the ground is to be used again. Leguminous manures like clover can be used for boosting nitrogen levels.

TO DIG OR NOT TO DIG?

When the soil is constantly covered with a crop, there is little or no nutrient loss, but there can be a build up of pests as birds will be unable to get at them. So, as with everything in organic gardening, you should try and achieve a balance. In the pea and potato patches, the soil will be cleared in time to sow a green manure, but roots and brassicas may only be partly cleared before the end of September. In this case, simply rough dig the ground and leave it bare. The birds can then get in to the slugs, their eggs and the overwintering cocoons of pests like sawflies. 'No dig' gardeners will argue that a natural balance will be achieved when the soil is not dug over, but they don't point out that this is hard to achieve and that digging aerates the soil, thereby making it healthier. So over a 4 year crop rotation, the ground will receive green manures half of the time and will enjoy thorough pest control for the rest of the time.

COMPOST

Garden compost should be used while plants are growing, so it is very wasteful to spread good compost or well rotted farmyard manure at this time of year. Fresh manure can, however, be spread on the soil just now to allow it to rot down before Spring. It should be emphasised that even here, many of the nutrients will still be washed away over the Winter.

GOOD GARDEN HYGIENE

When crops are harvested, remove all plant debris, composting what is not diseased. This will make sure pests and diseases have nowhere to shelter or develop. The grey aphid which attacks brassicas, overwinters in old brassica leaves and stumps, so by clearing these away, you'll help break the pest's cycle. The decaying leaves of Winter crops like sprouts and broccoli should also be removed throughout the Winter as they may harbour pests. Fallen leaves from scabby apple trees carry the fungal spores which then spread the disease in the following year, so remove and compost them. These spores will be largely killed by composting and, in any case, will only attack apple trees. So a clean, tidy food growing area will greatly reduce pests and diseases.

THE FRUITCAGE

After fruiting, soft fruit bushes should be pruned. The guiding principles are: ensure a good shape and provide good ventilation to reduce the risk of disease.

With bushes, thin out branches, removing spindly ones and leaving the strongest. Make sure branches don't cross over or become entangled in any way as this will make it difficult to harvest next year's fruit and by reducing ventilation you run the risk of fungal attack. To achieve a good shape, you may need to shorten some branches. Your bush will produce a smaller number of larger berries this way.

Red and white currants grow on old wood, so remove a lot of the new growth, leaving stronger branches to replace the older ones in time. The opposite is the case with blackcurrants, but in Scotland it's essential to leave about a third of the old branches as new shoots do not all have time to grow to fruiting maturity, a proportion of old branches ensures a better crop. Gooseberry bushes need good ventilation, so should grow on at least a 9" 'leg'. As with most bushes, fruiting branches should fan out from a clear open centre. Brambles and Tayberries fruit on new wood, with long branches tied into a fence, so fruiting branches should be trained in one direction, with the new ones going in the opposite direction, making it easy to cut out the old ones at the end of the season. After fruiting, old strawberry leaves should be completely cut out, leaving new growth to quickly establish. Old raspberry canes should be removed and the new ones tied in to the frame so they don't blow about over Winter.