

November in the Vegetable Garden

By Bill Swantner, Bexar County Master Gardener



Photo: Lynn Cox, BCMG

This month in the vegetable garden, it's all about the weather.

About mid-October, we started having our fall "cold fronts." These cold fronts dry out the upper levels of our garden soil, which is why mulch is so critical. Mulch protects the soil from the drying effects of the wind. The recommended mulch is a double shredded, native mulch. A double shredded mulch is easier to manipulate around the base of the plants and a double shredded mulch absorbs and holds onto water better than a single shredded mulch. Ideally, the mulch should be about two inches from the base of the plant.

The cooler temperatures mean that the plants require less water and more carefully placed water. As David Rodriguez, Bexar County AgriLife Extension Horticulturist, frequently reminds gardeners, one of the biggest problems in gardening is over watering. Monitor the soil moisture. If it is not dry, do not water it.

In addition to overwatering is careless watering. Watering your plants late in the day often means that the leaves stay wet much longer. Water left on the leaves of vegetables is a breeding ground for disease. One solution is to water early in the day so the sun can dry the leaves faster. And if you are hand-watering, apply the water to the soil rather than the leaves. Drip irrigation is an excellent solution when set up correctly, as water is only applied to the soil around the root system and keeps the leaves dry.

The average date for the first freeze in the San Antonio area is November 12. Early preparation is better than last minute scrambling. It's much easier to plan for cold weather when it's warm and sunny, going to the store to buy protective cloth or buying and laying that extra layer of mulch. Sometimes it means making room on the south side of the house for more sensitive vegetables so that, when the weather forecast calls for cold weather, the protective measures are ready. The preparations made in the last of the warm days in November are important, as we shift from warm weather vegetable gardening to cold weather gardening.

This is the last of this series of articles. I would like to thank the contributing authors for their expertise, and I would like to thank Lynn Cox for her editing skills, which make my writing style readable.

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