

Maximize the Harvest: Preparing Now for the Fall



It's only August, so why am I bringing up the fall already? While stores are already preparing for Halloween, gardeners are still enjoying the warm days of summer. If you're looking to get the biggest bang for your buck in your garden, planning in anticipation of fall is critical. Sowing seed now and keeping your plots organized ensures that you'll still be harvesting when October and November roll around. When others head to the supermarket in November to buy expensive greenhouse lettuce they no longer have access to in their gardens, you'll be harvesting hardy veggie varieties and saving money.

When do I need to start sowing seeds for the fall garden?

The optimal time to start planting seeds for the cooler season

depends on your particular growing region. Find out what your first frost date is if you haven't already. Here's a useful resource: <https://www.almanac.com/gardening/frostdates>

Remember that a first frost date is just an estimate. It may vary from year to year. Mother Nature is unpredictable after all!

Check your seed packets to find information on maturity times. Using your region's first frost date, count backward to find out when your planting window is. Harvesting after frost is possible, but vegetables need to be mature by the time the cold weather comes around. Colder temperatures typically slow plant growth.

An example:

You want to plant some lettuce that will be ready to harvest during the fall months.

The seed packet says the variety matures in 50 days. If your last frost date is October 30th, then the last day you can sow the lettuce seed for optimal growth is September 10th.

Best plants for the fall garden

The ideal options for a fall garden depend significantly on your region and the amount of time you have until that first frost. Cold hardy plants are an excellent choice since you can keep harvesting even post-frost. Here are a few examples of cold-hardy vegetables that you can grow:

- Kale
- Carrots
- Collards
- Spinach
- Lettuce
- Swiss Chard

Choose varieties that mature early if your growing window before the first frost is short. Some vegetable varieties are exclusively bred to withstand cold temperatures.

Get a jumpstart and enjoy the bounty

Don't wait until early-September to start thinking about your cool season garden. Start right now. Check your seed collection to see what you have on hand to sow. Make sure you've got the space, too. When filling up your plots in the spring and summer, don't forget to keep a spot saved for starting seeds later in the season.

If this is your first year attempting a fall harvest, write everything down. Keep a notebook with your sowing dates and observations. Notice a plant that didn't do well when frost came along? Try seeding earlier or choosing a different variety.

Keeping Up with the Harvest



Summer is in full swing, and that means the gardening season has really begun. Seeds and seedlings have grown into sturdy, productive plants. Pollinators are out in grand numbers, and there's no shortage of stuff to pick from the branches, vines and stems around the garden. Tomatoes are starting to ripen, eggplants are slowly appearing, green beans ready to pick. All your hard work won't be worthwhile if you don't keep up with the harvest. It's one of the challenges I've faced over the years. Gardening will only be fruitful and save you money if you take full advantage of the fruits of your labor. I've put together some helpful tips to ensure you get the most out of this bountiful time of year.

Pick produce at the right time – Harvest vegetables when they're ripe or near ripe. Too soon and you'll end up with hard green tomatoes more sour than sweet. Too late and your eggplant may be seedy and bitter.

Harvest frequently – Pick vegetables often to signal to your healthy plants that they can keep right on producing. Some plants only produce a single crop (e.g., determinate tomatoes,

potatoes, cabbage) but others like lettuce, beans, and squash will continue to provide until the first frost.

Collect recipes – Having recipes ready to go will ensure you're prepared for an onslaught of tomatoes and a whole bunch of beets. Look for recipes that utilize preservation methods like fermentation, pickling, and canning, to prevent waste when plants produce in abundance.

Succession sow – When you've pulled certain plants from your garden because they've become unproductive or you've added them to your dinner plate don't just let that space go to waste. Plant new seeds. Continually harvesting and sowing ensures you'll always have something producing in your garden. If you garden in a cold climate, like me, choose varieties (e.g., cold hardy kale) that will mature in time for the fall and produce even when the mercury drops.

Keeping up with the rhythm of your garden means that you'll take full advantage of all it has to offer. It can be overwhelming for first-time gardeners to get into a harvesting groove, but it's worthwhile. Growing your own food will help you pinch pennies unless you don't use what you grow. Not sure when it's time to pick the veggies in your garden? It's a good idea to keep seed packets, even if they're empty. They contain valuable information. On the back of most packets, you'll find how long it takes for a plant to mature, which should help you determine a ballpark harvesting time. The easiest way to tell for most plants? Appearance. The color and size of vegetables and fruits is a handy indicator that they're ripe for the picking. For unique varieties, check out the photo on the seed pouch. If you're still stuck, ask a veteran gardener or perform a quick Google search. Over time, you'll get the hang of it, and you'll intuitively know when it's time to harvest.

Top Ten Frugal Gardening Tips



Gardening doesn't need to be an expensive hobby. I've been digging in the dirt for a long time, and have found ways to minimize costs and maximize results. Here are my top ten ways to garden frugally and keep this rewarding hobby affordable.

All of these are tried and true, as well as easy to do. They also work in most any part of the country – regardless of the soil or climate conditions.

1. **Make your own compost** – There are plenty of good reasons to compost at home. You'll cut down on the waste you produce and spend less on trash bags over time. It's an inexpensive way to make rich fertilizer for your garden so you won't have to pay big bucks on commercially sold options.
2. **Reuse rainwater** – In addition to being good for the planet, collecting rainwater to use in your garden can help save you money on costly water bills. Having water on hand during the dry months is extremely handy in areas where drought is commonplace.
3. **Save seeds** – The cost of buying seeds for planting every year adds up. Thankfully, most plants produce seeds that are easy to save. You can even participate in local or online swaps with your new saved seeds to get your hands on hard to find varieties.
4. **Trade with other gardeners** – Get to know other gardeners in your neighborhood. They may be willing to swap veggies with you! Have an abundance of summer squash?

Trade them for something you didn't have a chance to plant, like onions or eggplant.

5. **Start from seed** – Sure, you can buy seedlings at your local greenhouse or hardware store, but purchasing seeds is cheaper. Starting from seed ensures you grow the exact varieties you want. A mini seed-starting setup doesn't cost too much and if taken care of properly will provide you with an impressive yield.
6. **Use natural pesticides** – Commercial pesticides harmful to the environment and can be expensive, too. Make your own pest-control mixtures using non-toxic, biodegradable household products.
7. **Plant high yield crops** – Choose to grow vegetables that will produce a lot and keep producing as you harvest. Good choices include indeterminate tomatoes, summer squash, eggplant, beans, and cucumbers.
8. **Grow the most expensive produce** – What are your favorite veggies? Write down a list and head to the grocery store to find out which ones are the priciest. If you live in a climate with harsh winters, grow and freeze produce that's expensive or hard to find during the cold months.
9. **Scour the neighborhood on garbage day** – Establishing a garden doesn't have to hurt your wallet! Drive around town on trash day to look for found objects that might be used to build raised beds or act as plant supports. You can also find potting soil this way.
10. **Choose easy to maintain plants** – This is particularly important if you're a beginner. Don't choose hard to care for plants if you haven't yet developed a green thumb. It'll likely be a waste of money, and you'll end up discouraged.

And there you have it! Gardening on the cheap is totally doable. It requires a bit of thriftiness and a lot of patience, but there's nothing like the taste of biting into a fresh garden tomato as a reward for all your hard work.

Frugal Gardening Quick Tips

Have a great gardening tip that saves money? Share it with us. Simply [email us](#) so we can share it with everyone and others can save from your favorite frugal gardening tricks:

Weeds

- If you need to use a weed killer, buy the concentrate. It's expensive, and it doesn't work as well if you dilute it. So don't. Instead, pour some into a small eyedropper bottle (I use an old Schulz container), and put one drop smack in the the middle of the weed you want to kill. You won't hit the other plants, and it gets right to the root. The other alternative is to put the concentrate in a bottle and use a brush – we use an old rubber cement bottle, well cleaned out – and brush it on onion weeds or others that are difficult to kill and impossible to spray or dig up. – *Courtesy of [Flash](#)*
- Sprinkle salt between bricks or stones to keep grass from growing & to kill weeds in your lawn.

More Gardening Articles

Prepare Your Lawn For Fall

By Matt Morrison

Hemingway once said, “America is the land of wide lawns and narrow minds.” Now, I don’t know about narrow minds, but we definitely love our lawns. Fall is one of the most important times of the year to perform lawn care maintenance.

The process you need to follow will vary with the type of turf on your lawn. The two main types of turf grasses are cool season and warm season. The main difference is that cool season grasses require regular maintenance throughout the fall and winter seasons, while warm season grasses need to be prepped for the following spring. Common cool season grasses are ryegrasses, fescues, bluegrasses, and bentgrasses. Common warm season grasses include St. Augustinegrass, Bermudagrass, Zoysiagrass, and Buffalograss. If you are unsure what type you have on your lawn, you can take a sample to your local county extension and find out which type you have. The most important thing to remember is that maintenance doesn’t end when the grass stops growing... [Read More](#)

Gardener Safety Tips

By Allison Thompson

Whether you happen to be green thumbbed or you simply want to start gardening it is essential that you are prepared for any little surprises that may occur. You may want to create a beautifully landscaped lawn, or you might even want to grow some vegetables, or you could just want to surround your home with beautiful flowers. But whatever the situation you must keep in mind the following tips when you start any gardening project.

Firstly consider do you suffer from any pollen allergies. If you are like so many people nowadays you probably suffer from some type of allergy. This may affect you every day and during every season, but with all sufferers things can be even worse during the spring and summer months. This is because there is pollen in the air and everything will be in bloom and you may

find it difficult to spend large amounts of time outdoors. So before you start any new project in the garden it is important that you consider whether you have any allergies or not and if you have to what extent do they affect you. If you find them be from moderate to severe it may be well worth avoiding working out doors... [Read More](#)

Budget Garden Basics

By Kathleen Wilson

Decorating the outside of your home very often involves some type of garden. Not only can living plants add value, curb appeal, and charm to your home, gardening has been known to soothe ones soul. Gardening on a tight budget can be a challenge, but with a little knowledge, a little creativity, and a do-it-yourself spirit, it can be much more rewarding than traditional landscaping.

1. Start Small: Pick out a small spot in your yard or decide to grow in containers only and pick up a few basic pots. If you spend a whole weekend tearing up your yard your first time out, chances are you will become overwhelmed and find it an unhappy experience, not to mention a waste of money. Let the joys of growing things be a pleasure, not a chore. You can always expand your garden as you gain experience... [Read More](#)

Gardens From Garbage – Book Review

By Lisa A. Koosis

Although I consider myself an avid gardener, living in a one-bedroom apartment has sometimes hindered my hobby. My apartment complex, though landscaped nicely, doesn't leave much room for individual tenants to care for individual gardens, and there are no outdoor windowsills for outdoor window boxes. So, that leaves indoor gardening, and

consequently, I've become something of a houseplant aficionado.

The trouble with houseplants and indoor gardening in general, is that it tends to limit you creatively. When is the last time you've found a selection of houseplant seeds in your local garden center? Houseplant seeds just aren't to be found. In fact, the only place I've been able to locate them is on the Internet, and then they don't come cheap... [Read More](#)

Landscaping On A Budget

By Rex Ryan

It is possible to have an appealing, unique look to your yard without investing thousands of dollars every year in order to do so. Practicing some basic conservation rules can help you to save money and still make your yard look great.

One great new innovation that is all the rage is the art of xeriscaping. As water becomes ever more valuable a commodity, many homeowners are seeking to conserve their water costs by choosing plants that do not need very much water in order to survive. These plants are available in many different varieties, and they will add a splash of color to your yard while still saving you money. Know which plants tend to use a lot of water- cedar hedges, for example, are the landscaping equivalent of the sports utility vehicle. Don't plant any if you are concerned about your water costs... [Read More](#)

5 Frugal Gardening Traits

If you're creating a garden on the cheap or going for the frugal to downright FREE garden, here's my list of must haves:

1) The frugal gardener **needs to be flexible**, as in no master landscape plan set in concrete. The frugal gardener lets the plants be the guide and the garden sort of “happens by happy accident.” For example, if you respond to a “free plants” ad on Craigslist, you will have no idea what you’re really getting. Being flexible lets you look at the new plants and say “Wow, they’re just what I needed!” no matter what they are.

2) **Physical flexibility** helps too. Keep this in mind when the ad on Craigslist says “You dig!”

3) **Patience** by the wheelbarrow load is also necessary if you’re keeping your gardening budget down. Small plants, cuttings or starting your garden from seeds is not the instant way to garden. Gardeners need to learn to wait – and then wait some more, especially if you’re aiming for frugal. It can take years to create a garden this way.

4) Terms such as “meek” and “mild” don’t usually describe the frugal gardener. Toss the shy, quiet and unassuming traits out the window and practice being **outgoing and assertive**. The more you ask for free or reduced prices on items, the easier it gets and getting told “no” just pushes you on to the next possibility.

5) **Creativity and an open mind** will help the frugal gardener use what IS available rather than having a set shopping list of items that “need” to be purchased.

The good news is that if you love to garden and don’t have a lot of money, these traits can be learned and when they are, you’ll have a fantastic garden on the cheap.

Build An Organic Waste System

Want to take your kitchen to a new level of “green”? Tried a compost pile in your backyard and had to hide from your neighbors due to the smell? Tired of finding your compost items brought out to your front yard by the neighborhood animals?

Well, there is an alternative. Make a backyard food waste system and you can green up your kitchen by not throwing your food scraps into the trash and you won't be stinking up the neighborhood either. This is the supply list you will need:

- 20 gallon galvanized trash can, with lid. Be sure to look for a can with handles on 2 sides as well as a handle on the lid.
- Bungee cord
- Power drill with approx drill bit, suitable for metal
- Safety equipment – goggles & gloves
- Shovel

After assembling your equipment, all you need to do is start drilling holes into the bottom of the can. You'll want to make at least 10-15 holes spaced around the bottom. Next , lay the can on its side and start drilling holes in the bottom third all the way around. What you are aiming for is a drainage for your new waste system.

Once you have the holes drilled, you're ready for the hardest part of the project. You need to dig a hole in your garden area that is big enough to place the bottom third of your can into it. You want the can to be easily accessible so you will use it, but not right outside your back door. Try to locate it where you won't be digging through established root systems from trees or shrubs. You also want to take into consideration your view from the house or any outdoor rooms you may have; hidden behind shrubbery would be better than out in plain

sight.

When you have the can buried in the ground so all the holes are covered with earth, you're ready to put your system to use. You want to limit the items you put in the system to those without animal proteins. Any plant based items are fine. A good idea is to find a plastic container with a tight fitting lid that fits into your refrigerator – this can be your temporary holding area for your kitchen scraps. Storing the scraps inside the plastic container and inside your refrigerator will keep the scraps from smelling up your kitchen and you'll only need to empty them into the waste system when it is full.

When you place the plant scraps into the waste system can outside, be sure to securely attach the lid to the can with the bungee cord. This will ensure that no wandering animals get into it and ensure you don't find the contents strewn about all over your yard the next morning.

A 20 gallon can should hold the kitchen waste from a typical family of 4 for up to 9 months to a year before it gets full. Once full, simply leave the lid on and forget it for another 9 months to a year. At that point, you will have Black Gold, or rich, nutrient filled organic compost, ready to add to your garden beds.

Since you will need to let the one can rest for a year while the contents decompose, be sure to keep your eyes open for your 2nd can. This will allow you to continue with your food waste "System" Once you have 2 cans, they will just keep cycling through: one in use while the other one is decomposing.

Free Garden Party Plants

There are a lot of different ways to [acquire free plants](#) and even [unusual ways](#) depending on how adventurous you are. Another sneaky way to acquire free plants is to throw a Garden Party.

No, not the big hat, posh refreshment type of Garden Party, but a party to increase the size of your garden. Grab your list of friends & acquaintances, be it on your PC, your palm pilot or an old fashioned address book and let's get started. Here's a list to-do list to start you thinking, but feel free to skip some or add others to tailor the party to your group of friends.

First you need to **pick a date**. It's best to hold this between late spring and harvest season so people have plenty of plants to share. Along with the date, you need to **pick a place**. The party would work in a public garden or at a home, inside or outside, depending on the weather. To round out the three first steps, you need to **pick a time**. Make it convenient when the most number of people can attend – not too early in the morning or too late in the evening. Luncheons usually work best.

Once you have the date, time and place, it's time to **get the invites out**. Do this very early, at least a "Hold the Date" announcement, so guests can plan for the event. At this point, you will need to **explain the event** & let the guests know **what they need to bring**.

An easy way to visualize this is to think of a Cookie Exchange and just substitute plants. Let's say you're inviting 6 people (plus yourself) – each person attending will need to bring 6 plants to share with others. You should give some examples of what types of plants they could bring; Potted plants they have divided, herbs they have started, cuttings they rooted or

houseplants they took cuttings from. It is also a good idea for you to **pot up extra items**, in case one of your guests cancels at the last minute.

In addition, you may want to **ask the guests to bring an ingredient** from their garden to add to a large salad so the cost of a luncheon will be minimal. The host/hostess will then only need to provide salad dressings, beverages and perhaps a dessert to round out the menu.

Another option or addition is to see if guests would like to **bring a garden tool to swap**. Most gardeners have an extra implement that they'd like to switch for something else. All the trades can be set up outside the entry area on a table for convenience.

A way to draw more interest from the participants is to contact your local garden club or nursery to see if anyone would be willing to **speak or show a demo** for your event.

Check out an assortment of gardening magazines and books to **add to the décor**. Anything garden related could be used for centerpieces: flower arrangements, garden implements, flower petals scattered around the tables. Use your imagination here to get everyone in the spirit.

If you hold your party during harvest season, you could also ask everyone to bring extra produce from their gardens to be **taken to your local food bank**. If you do this, be sure you coordinate with the food banks hours so you're sure the items will be delivered when they are fresh.

After spending an afternoon with friends, enjoying a garden fresh salad and learning some valuable garden tips, it will be time for the actual Plant Exchange. Have each guest **describe what they are sharing, along with what type of care it needs and how they used the particular plant** in their gardens. Once done, everyone who attends should have some great new plants to add to their garden.

So what are you waiting for? Start planning and planting for your own Garden Party this season.

Reusing Stuff In Your Garden

Earth Day isn't just a day in April to frugal gardeners. No matter what month it is, we're always on the look out for ways to tread lightly in our little corner of the world.

Here is a short list of some of the items which many people throw away that I reuse in some way while I am gardening. By no means is this a complete listing, but it is a good starting point to get your creative juices flowing:

Plastic knives: I love these. I've always been a terribly lazy gardener and in the past I never marked the plants and seeds when I've stuck them in the ground. I have this problem no more. With my permanent marker and a handful of plastic knives, I've got plant markers for everything this season.

Old panty hose: I like cutting the legs off these and using them to tie up plants like tomatoes. These are ideal because they stretch a bit so the plants aren't held rigidly to the trellis.

Clear plastic clam shell type containers: I use the clamshell packaging for muffins and such by poking a drainage hole in the bottom, filling with potting soil and planting seeds in these. Once done, close the top down and you have an instant mini greenhouse. If it gets too warm, simply open the lid. When the plants get large enough, you can transplant them to the garden, rinse out the makeshift greenhouse and store it away for next year.

Shower curtains: I use a couple of old shower curtains that have been around for years. They are extremely handy for transplanting mature plants. I hate to get garden soil on my lawn since that usually means small rocks meeting the lawn mower, so I spread the shower curtain out next to the plant that is going to be moved or get divided. All the dirt that gets dug up is piled onto the shower curtain. If I'm going to move the plant, or perform a bit of surgery on it, a second shower curtain is handy too. I'll use it like a skid to move the plant from place to place, eliminating the need to pick it up at all. Then when I'm done with projects like this, I can pick up the edges and send the dirt directly where I want back into the garden. No dirt on the lawn and the project is finished without having to shovel all the dirt back again.

Old pop cans: I've used these for years in the bottoms of all of my planters and containers. If you fill the bottom third of a container with slightly bent / crushed pop cans, you can use less potting soil when planting. This will give you a lighter pot when finished and costs less per pot. The cans allow space at the bottom of the pot for drainage, so there is need to keep a supply of gravel for this purpose either.

Empty plastic pop bottles: These are wonderful to make a drip water system for hard to water plants. I have a couple areas with plants where the water runs right off if I use the hose or a sprinkler. By leaving the cap on the bottle, and cutting off the bottom, you can create a drip system. It's your choice whether you want to put in the garden on watering day or just leave it behind the plant and out of sight.

I poke a couple holes in the shoulder of the bottle, then bury the top of the bottle along side the plant that needs watering. Fill the bottle and let the water slowly seep out at root level and the water run off problem is solved. Depending on the area in my garden, I've used both the green colored plastic and the clear ones. Chose whichever shows less in relation to the plant and the location.

Broken flower pots: If a pot still has one side that is good, these make cute additions to the garden. Bury the broken part and plant inside the “cave” that is created. These broken pots are a good way to highlight particular plants or to tuck in little bits of tiny ground cover.

Broken garden tools: You can stick the handle end in the ground, leaving the shovel or rake head visible. You can then train a vine up the handle or use the new “stake” to tie up a plant.

As you can see, there are a lot of ways to use various objects that would normally end up in the landfill as part of your garden. We all should make a conscious effort to celebrate Earth Day every month by reusing some of these familiar items in our garden. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle should all be familiar words to a gardener. Other helpful hints can be found at [Homeclick](#).

Free Organic Fertilizer

All set for another article telling you the jobs you should be tackling from your “to do” list this winter?

Well, think again! I’m not going to tell you to clean and sharpen your shovels (although we should all be doing that!), nor am I going to give you a schedule to get your fruit trees pruned and your roses cut back (although those activities need to be done too).

This idea will give you more flowers and produce more veggies while saving you water (which saves you time and money) and save even more time since it should cut down on the weeding too. The best part is it can all be yours for free. No money.

Just some time and energy this winter to have a better garden come spring and summer.

A novel or brand new tip? Nope. This tip is as old as the hills. Enrich your soil this winter & you will reap the benefits later.

Animal Waste: I'm lucky enough to have horses and chickens on my property, so I regularly add the bedding materials to my garden areas. If you're not out in farm country, there will still be places to search for this Garden Gold. Drag out the yellow pages, or keep your eyes open as you drive through your community. Watch for businesses that need to dispose of animal waste & then make a contact. Stop in when you see a riding stable & ask if you can pick up a container full of fertilizer. Locate the feed store closest to you and ask if you can post a Wanted notice on a bulletin board. Put an ad on Craigslist and you'll probably be blessed with several contacts.

Wood Chips / Sawdust: Besides animal wastes, you could also be searching out businesses that work with wood for sawdust and wood chips. Both of these make great mulch and will cut down on the need to water as often. Winter is a great time to spend digging up contacts since we can't be out digging in the dirt.

Coffee Grinds: Coffee stands regularly need to dispose of used coffee grounds, and while there is no real proof they provide nutrients to your soil, they do seem to add a non clumping sort of texture to my gardens. Living in Starbucks land as I do (the Pacific NW), coffee grounds are prolific and again – free.

Yard Waste: If you didn't get all your fall leaves picked up, do it now and stick them in black trash bags. Poke some air holes in the bags, close them up and store someplace where they won't freeze. They will start decomposing and be ready to dig into your garden space come spring!

The winter will barely be long enough if you start on this list now. There are so many sources of free items to add to your soil, you might not even have time to sharpen that shovel!