

# Sanitation is the secret to successful gardening

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

Some fall vegetable gardeners have inquired if I got my broccoli transplants in last week.

Yes, I did get my transplants in and added some Brussels sprouts and cauliflowers in the mix to boot.

I was motivated to get them quickly because of the horde of mosquitoes provided incentives to move fast.

The fall season still is trying to gain a consistent foothold but this is the Texas Upper Gulf Coast and summer's weather sometimes can be reluctant to yield to the cooler weather of fall.

Although we recently have had a few bouts of respectably cool weather, hot weather spells still insist on dashing our hopes and expectations of a decent fall

I had hoped my air-

conditioning unit would get some much-needed rest, but I have been amazed to hear the home unit cranking up periodically throughout the day and even into the early nighttime hours.

Some homeowners are ready to start a fall garden and take advantage of cool weather conditions. Other vegetable gardeners would prefer to skip the fall garden ritual as they are ready to forget about dealing with plant disease and insects in the vegetative garden until next spring.

Even so, this time of year actually is the perfect time to start controlling next year's disease and insects. A little work in the fall can prevent a lot of trouble next spring.

Why is this so? A fall cleanup of the vegetable garden involves the removal of spent leaves and stems on which many plant disease organisms

(called pathogens) and insect pests survive the winter.

This cleanup, formally known as fall sanitation, is a crucial step needed to reduce the number of disease-causing organisms and insects pests during the next spring garden, as doing so will takes longer for populations of plant disease-causing pathogens and insect pests to build up to damaging levels. The following are some specific suggestions that are especially important.

Practicing good sanitation measures in the garden is important throughout the year. This especially is important for gardens that are only being partially used or not used at all during the cool fall and winter season.

In many cases, a high incidence of disease during time can be traced back in part to leaving diseased roots that have been left intact to decay on the surface of the soil or to leaving diseased foliage, stems and unharvested vegetables on the surface of the soil.

Gardeners should properly dispose of all plant parts remaining in the garden soon after plants have finished producing an edible product.

If the material is not badly diseased, it can be placed in a compost pile to undergo decomposition and then returned to the garden to add valuable



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organic matter.

Should the plants be badly diseased, however, they should be placed in the garbage for curbside pickup. Plants roots infested with root knot nematodes never should be placed in a compost pile because the chance of returning partially decomposed nematode-containing roots to the garden is too great.

Thoroughly till or deeply spade the soil to chop and incorporate all remaining foliage and roots into the soil so the plant material will be well-decomposed before the spring growing season.

If possible, till or spade the soil a second time. Infected leaves, stems and fruits can serve as a primary source for future infections on spring-planted vegetables especially if infected foliage is left on top of the ground.

A neglected garden site also can become an insect haven waiting to explode next spring with hundreds of hungry and unwanted insect pests.

Do not rear insects in your garden during the fall and winter seasons. Destroy their critical shelter areas and food supply and have fewer to control in your garden next spring.

All garden insects, like most living creatures, need shelter to survive unfavorable temperatures and other adverse weather conditions.

Certain others also need a food source. Several types of sanitation measures that aid in disease control will help control insect pest populations.

Ideal places for garden insects to survive the winter period are trash, vegetable stubble, unharvested fruits and tubers, boards and overgrown grass and weeds along the edge of a garden and fence rows.

Removing crop residues and disposing of

debris, weeds and other volunteer plants helps eliminate food and shelter for many garden pests such as cutworms, aphids, wireworms, white grubs, millipedes, sow bugs and spider mites.

Deep spading or rototilling the soil will expose many insects to be eaten by birds and other predators. Best results are obtained if the soil is tilled at least twice during the winter months.

It not only is important to keep your garden site clean, but it equally is important to mow and maintain its surroundings.

If you are not using part or all of your garden site this winter, do not wait until March or April to do your spring cleaning. Remember, when a garden plant stops producing, till it into the soil or take it to the compost pile

