WORDS from the
WILDCATS

K-State Research and Extension - Chisholm Trail District

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Hopefully everyone has had a successful garden season for 2020 and is looking forward to 2021! This week we’re going to discuss things you can do this fall to prepare your garden space for next year.

If your garden is done producing for the year you can start by chopping or shredding the plant material so it is easier to till into the soil. There are two benefits to incorporating old plant material into the soil: the first is as the plant material decomposes it releases nutrients back into the soil and second, it helps increase organic matter content in the soil which will help the soil hold more water and nutrients for future crops. If you choose a “no-till” approach it will be important to remove as much of the old plant material as possible to reduce insect and disease problems next year.

Another consideration for this fall would be to plant a cover crop to help with weed control and build soil health. Cover crops that will eventually be terminated and tilled into the soil will also help increase soil organic matter and the ability to save water and nutrients for future crops. Extension Horticulture Specialist Ward Upham recommends using a mixture of grass/small grains and legume cover crops. Grasses or small grains such as wheat (3/4-1 pound of seed per 1,000 square feet) or spring oats (2 to 4 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet) would work just fine. The spring oats will die out over the winter and can be tilled under in the spring, however, the wheat will need to be sprayed to kill or tilled under in early March. Legume cover crops such as hairy vetch or sweet clover would be an excellent choice for ground cover and provide an additional benefit by “fixing” nitrogen from the atmosphere and making it available in the soil for future crops. The hairy vetch or sweet clover should be seeded at a rate of 1/4 to 1/2 pound of seed per 1,000 square feet according to Ward Upham. You could also visit with a local crop seed dealer that sells cover crop seed and explore the idea of adding field tillage radish or turnip, as those help loosen up the soil and provide better water and air infiltration into the soil. The ideal time to seed these cover crop mixtures is mid-September to early October.

There is a weekly horticulture newsletter from K-State that we send out via email so if you would like to receive that newsletter or if you have any questions related to lawn, garden, or trees be sure to reach out to Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent, Tony Whitehair at 785-263-2001 or tonyw@ksu.edu