

DECEMBER vegetable garden

-Number one priority-Finish cleaning up your garden before the ground freezes. Add compost or manure to it and lightly turn under. Get it ready for next season-it makes it so much easier next spring if your garden beds are ready.

-Shorter daylight hours-We just hit shorter daylight hours (less than 10 hours of daylight) on Nov 27 here in Santa Fe. Everything slows way down or stops growing. I would not plant any seeds or transplants in greenhouses, high tunnels or cold frames until we start to see the daylight hours get longer on Jan 13 unless you are growing them under lights. This has nothing to do with Winter Solstice on Dec 21, which is actually our shortest day but has to do with less than 10 hours of daylight, which is about 1.5 months here. In other parts of the country further north they have a way longer period of low daylight hours.

-Weather conditions-La Niña conditions are now present and expected to continue through early winter 2016-17. But La Niña 2016-17 isn't looking like a spectacular event-this should bottom out as a weak La Niña event over the next several months, neutral conditions to be the most likely state by the first quarter of 2017. La Niña often creates drier than normal conditions through the next winter, whereas the Pacific Northwest is likely to be wetter than normal in early winter.

- Journal-Write down what worked in the garden this past summer and what didn't. What were the causes for any changes? Did you plant somewhere differently or perhaps the same space? Was weather a contributing factor? Did you fertilize? Or add amendments to the soil? Think about these things. What could you do differently next year?

- Catalogs-Order your new catalogs. That way you'll have them by January. Some of my favorites are Seed Savers Exchange, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, Wild Boar Farms (tomatoes), Native Seed Search (Native American seeds), John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds (Argentata chard, shallots), Wild Garden Seeds (fantastic greens and lettuces), Kitazawa (Asian greens), Peaceful Valley and Johnny's Seeds

- Speaking of catalogs, go through those old catalogs and throw them out!

- Research on the internet new and different veggies you may want to try next year while you are waiting for your catalogs to come in. I always want to try something new. Start a list of possible veggies and add to it as you find more. You may not try all of them but at least you won't forget them! (I've started mine and keep adding to it)

-Water your trees and perennials if we don't get precipitation. It was pretty dry in November so water in December on a warm day. Forget about it if your tree has snow around it and the ground is frozen-the water won't soak in frozen ground.

-Vermicomposting-Don't forget to feed your worms in your vermicomposting bin! They get hungry too! Also if it has been dry, give them water on a warm day. Don't give them so much food that it just sits there and freezes. For an outside plastic bin, maybe wrap it with a water heater blanket or surround it with straw bales to help keep the worms from freezing. You try living in a plastic box all winter without insulation! For bigger outside vermicomposting areas, put straw bales around the perimeter to add insulation. Also put straw on top. I covered mine with about 8-10 inches of straw and will check them every 2 weeks to see if I need to add more food.

-Animal waterers-If you feed birds, be sure you give them a source of water too. If my waterer is frozen, I boil water in a teapot and add it to my waterer to melt the ice. If you have bees, provide them water too as they may come out on a warm day.

Plan your next garden-Take a walk around your frozen tundra (garden) and start to plan your next year's garden. Walking around when it is barren can reveal problem areas. It's hard to 'see' when the garden is going on in the middle of the season with all the greenery. Perhaps you want to make a new bed or fix an old one.

-Organize your garden shed. Find all those tools you left outside-they're easy to see on the ground now that the garden is done!