

spread the word. Please see Sharon Roberts or Lindsay Amsberry during November to ensure that they orders any additional items you need for gifts.

As always, thank you for your support!

-Sharon Roberts

Editor's Note: *After many years of sharing her harvest of valuable information about gardening in Oak Bowery, Chip has asked for some time to enjoy her garden. Our new garden correspondent is Tom Hodges who will be sharing the "fruits" of his, Angie's and Lydia's great garden.* -SRR

AROUND THE HODGEDEROSA

The leaves are increasingly turning and falling, it's time to ramp up the compost pile with nutrient-rich leaves, and we're gearing up for winter. It's also time to plant woody plants such as fruit and nut trees. We're raking leaves and faithfully turning our compost, using what we can to mulch the garden beds. If it snows (big if), then it will add to the minerals that will be available to our garden in '09. Speaking of which, if you are planning to expand your beds for the spring or simply getting that first veggie bed prepared (in this economy, what are you waiting for?), remember to keep your feet off the beds so you don't kill the critters working tirelessly away at breaking down all the "black gold" you've added from the compost pile. Keep the foot paths mulched with what you can to cut down on weeds bound to poke through when the weather warms up. And now it's time to get ready for the wonders of the winter garden.

Winter gardening? Well, as Gov. Palin would say, with a wink, "You betcha!"

Fall planting for a winter harvest in our neck of the woods is what I call the cream of the sustainable crop. It also heads off my impatience for spring planting when I can get my hands back in the dirt. Planting in the fall blesses us with all sorts of delicious, cold weather goodies. And they can be grown right into spring!

GIMME SHELTER



Cold frames and their ilk are what keep salads green, fresh and tasty on New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, and even the Ides of March. You can start plants indoors or sow

directly in the beds. Transplants started indoors during October and November are ready to go out after 3-4 weeks, and it's also when we direct sow in the beds. Don't forget to harden them off first. Direct sow right through the Solstice.

We've employed plastic tunnels for years. For each tunnel, we use 10X25-foot plastic, cut to size, stretched over 1/2-inch diameter PVC cut into 5-foot lengths with the ends stuck into the ground on either side of the beds. If you're game, use enough to keep the top of the hoop about 18 inches above the center of the bed. For hoops, use whatever material you have handy—PVC, wire, saplings, etc. When the plastic is stretched across the top, we use old metal fence posts and scrap 2X4s to anchor the bottoms, even rocks; we don't bury the flaps in the ground because it's too much trouble to dig up when we harvest the crops. If you don't secure the edges, the top will blow off, trust me.

For cold frames, some people use hay bales formed into a square and other insulating methods, but in Lower Alabama that's overkill. It also takes up too much valuable growing space. Lydia and I nail together scrap wood for the sides. The bottom, of course, we leave open so we can set out succession plantings of tender salad items and sow more seeds. We top off each frame with any transparent material we can find. Years ago, we replaced a three-panel shower door with a curtain in our bathroom and now the glass doors sit atop our frames. If you can get your hands on some discarded windows, use them. The solid walls of the cold frame insulate the ground and keep the roots happy while the top lets in the rays of Mr. Sun. Just remember to ventilate your cold frames---if you don't, the plants **will** bake, even in January. Trust me. We don't worry so much about air temperature because it's all about no-freeze root zones and light.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Inside the frames and tunnels, plant the tender ones: lettuces, cilantro, and mâche (corn salad), a delicious winter salad staple-try it! Experiment---even the hardy plants like the warmth. Let's break it down: arugula, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbages, carrots, garlic, greens, leeks, onions, peas, spinach, radishes---all can be grown outside through the winter months. Just remember to use season-extending cold frames or tunnels when growing tender lettuces.

If winter gardening piques your interest, the consummate source is "Four Season Harvest" by Eliot Coleman. Get it now.

-Tom Hodges

For Jim Allen

"Healing," Papa would tell me, "is not a science, but the intuitive art of wooing nature."

-- W.H. Auden