

## **Garden Tips to Grow By**

In Central Florida we have been experiencing record amounts of rainfall, more water than any gardener needs to produce vegetables. This excess rain brought its share of problems such as unusual insects and disease infestations to our gardens. Our favorite tomatoes produce profusely but are as sweet as the year before.

Our local area also has been experiencing high temperatures which resulted in the production of summer vegetables starting to wane and therefore should be removed from the garden plot. Remove spent plants and add them to your compost pile. Insect pests that feed on these plants during summer and fall often lay eggs on the old plants. If the plants are left on the soil surface, insect eggs will survive the winter and hatch in the spring. If old plants are not diseased, you can work them back into the garden soil. This adds valuable organic matter to the soil and, at the same time, destroys insects and their eggs. If you just can't bear the thought of pulling out productive tomato plants, leave them in until they are done producing.

For those of you who have not yet started your fall garden, now is the time to put in broccoli, lettuce, radish, spinach and other green leafy vegetable transplants. Please note that if you chose to sow seeds over using young seedlings you will have to wait at least four weeks for seeds to germinate and get big enough to transplant. After you have removed your summer crop, prepare your garden beds for fall planting by tilling and adding organic matter and compost to add nutrients to the soil.

Fall is a good time to prepare for your spring garden. Take your soil sample to your local cooperative extension office for an analysis. This analysis will give you an indication of the soil pH, the soil nutrients level and give recommendations on how to fix any underlying issue. In addition, planting cover crops is a great way to help replenish the soil with nutrients depleted by last season's crop. Cover crops are leguminous plants that are established not for eating purpose but usually cut down in spring before going to seed and then turned into the soil to enrich the soil as a green manure for the next crop.

For more information on vegetables and other related horticulture topics, contact Grantly Ricketts with the UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at 321-697-3000 or email [gricketts@ufl.edu](mailto:gricketts@ufl.edu).