

## Next year's vegetable and fruit crops start now

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You may be happy that the gardening season is behind you for now, but fall is a good time to manage and prevent disease in next year's vegetable and fruit crops. Residue from this year's garden may still be standing, even after being killed by heavy frosts and cold temperatures. Now is the time to take preemptive measures to help ensure a successful and bountiful garden next season.

Cleaning things up in the fall can help cut back on disease in the following harvest season. Many pathogens responsible for diseases commonly seen in home fruit and gardens can overwinter or survive between crops on equipment, mummified fruit and other plant residue. Here are tips to prevent the spread of disease and be ready for the next growing season:

Remove old plant debris and trash from the garden or greenhouse and burn or bury it. Thoroughly clean tools and equipment and sanitize with disinfectant. Chop, mow or mulch plant matter into small pieces so they will decompose more quickly. Several plant pathogens can survive in these residues during the winter and threaten next year's crops. Plowing or using a shallow cultivation can also speed up the decomposition rate of plant residue and allow more time for plant matter to break down and the pathogens to die.

For fruit trees, the most important step in next year's disease management is destroying old, mummified fruits. Rake them up and either burn, bury or toss them in the garbage. This old fruit is a perfect breeding ground for disease causing pathogens. If they're still laying there next spring when the weather warms up, a little rain can splash spores up onto to the newly forming fruit and the cycle repeats itself all over again.

Rotation is another powerful tool that should be implemented to prevent disease. It slows the buildup of pathogens in the vegetable garden, preventing problems in the long run. For best results, avoid planting the same or closely related crop species in the same general vicinity more than once every three years.

Even though spring is months away, start thinking about what you'll grow and where it will go in the garden. Making notes of variety, placement and yield from the past season while it is fresh in your mind is especially useful, since it is easy to forget the details over the long winter months.

Also, start mulling over the varieties you are likely to plant. Resistant varieties can significantly reduce or eliminate damage from disease and can allow a gardener to lower (or possibly eliminate) use of fungicide for a particular crop. Keep in mind that resistant varieties do not eliminate disease. Consult your seed supplier or catalog for more information.

A garden takes planning and careful consideration, but successful disease management begins with the few simple steps outlined above. If you start now, you'll have built a strong

foundation for a successful disease management program in your home garden. For more information, please contact the Graves County Cooperative Extension Service at 247-2334.

(Source: Kenny Seebold, UK extension plant pathologist)

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