Preparing Soil for winter

Start by pulling up all dead and unproductive plants and place this residue on top of the soil to be tilled under, or in the compost heap. Remove any diseased or insect infested plant material. Leaving this plant material behind would allow for diseases and insects to become active in the spring and add to next years garden pest problems.

The best practice is to remove infested plant material from the garden or burn it. Burning will kill any diseases or insects present in the plant wastes. Spread the ashes on the garden to gain the benefit of their mineral nutrients. If burning laws in your area prohibit you from burning anything, haul the diseased material to a landfill.

After clean-up add compost to the garden. Compost contains highly nutritious, decomposed plant material and beneficial organisms, and is an excellent soil-builder. By spreading compost and other wastes on the soil and tilling them in, you are adding nutrients to the soil for next year's crops.

Don't overlook other excellent sources of organic material available during the fall. Leaves are abundant, and neighbors will usually be glad to give their leaves to you. Put some on the garden now and store some for next year's mulch. To help leaves decompose quickly, try running a lawn mower back and forth over the pile. Put the shredded leaves directly onto the garden or compost them. Chop the mulch fine enough that it will break down over the winter. Many farms and stables want to get rid of manure piles before winter sets in. This is the right time to get the organic material in the garden and compost pile.

If you wait until spring to add organic material to the garden, it may not have time to decompose and add its valuable nutrients to the soil by the time you are ready to plant and you may have to delay planting to a later date. Hot, or very fresh, manure can burn young seedlings and plants.   By adding these materials in the fall, you give them plenty of time to decompose and blend into the soil before planting time.