

Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. The seasons are definitely changing here in Wyoming. I can feel fall in the air a little bit cooler, a little bit crisper. And honestly this is the time of year when I really just kind of feel over the whole garden thing and I'm ready to move on with my life. But I'm here to remind myself and to maybe remind you that if we can muster up just a bit more motivation right now, there are a number of things we can do that aren't overly complicated that will seriously set us up for success when spring rolls around. And that is what we're diving into in today's episode. I'm your host Jill Winger, and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel disenchanting with our modern lives. I'll teach you how to leave the rat race and create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills.

Speaker 1: [01:15](#) These last few days of summer are precious. Amen. Like you gotta soak them up. You got to enjoy them. You have to sear into your memory what it feels like to go outside without a coat and without the air hurting your face. You know what I mean? And so that's what we've been doing. We've been enjoying the animals and riding the horses and doing still some watering, weeding chores, but definitely not as much as we did earlier in the summer. And you know, the garden actually surprisingly looks pretty darn good right now considering how late it is in the year. I still have the potatoes to dig up. We're eating beets and beans for supper. The corn is ready to roll. I have a single solitary pumpkin that's kind of sorta orange, which is very encouraging considering all of my pumpkin seeds rotted when I first planted them. And I had to replant well into June, which is not very much time for pumpkin.

Speaker 1: [02:22](#) So I'm feeling pretty good with where we ended up even though this definitely was not my best year on record. So in some years I have experimented with the idea of putting in a fall garden, uh, where you plant vegetables late in the summer and then they grow. They have to be vegetables that grow quickly, right? But they'd grow through that last bit of summer into fall and usually can handle a frost or two. So that is an option for some years. Other years, like this year I'm kinda tired it all and I'm ready to just be done. I, especially since this year was such a roller coaster, so I'm not doing any fall gardening. I'm just taking what I can get from what is out there right now. And then I'm going to transition into preparing the garden for its hibernation. Actually at this point, I've even prematurely put some of my raised beds to sleep, what I call it, putting them to bed for the winter because like for example, my onions were hailed out and so I had to pull them out a couple of weeks ago, salvage what I

could, and that bed was empty and I just decided to turn off the sprinkler in that bed, cover it with some mulch and just let it sit.

Speaker 1: [03:45](#) So I've started a little bit of that work, but when the weather really changes and it gets cold, it's really hard to keep up that motivation of cleanup and preparations for spring. So what I like to do is really plan ahead and I'm going to encourage you to do the same because if we can do a few of these simple tasks, even when it's a little cold out there, maybe when it's freezing or maybe there's a little snow, but if we can keep up this slight bit of activity out in the garden just as we close out the season, it really makes a difference in the spring. It's going to help our soil, it's going to help our yields next year and it's really going to help our stress levels once those warmer temperatures roll around. So I want to take you through a couple of my favorite ways to put the garden to sleep and prepare it for winter.

Speaker 1: [04:34](#) You don't have to do any of these. Honestly. There's some years I just don't, when the snow catches me off guard, it doesn't happen. All is not lost. It will be fine. But if you can do a few of these, it really does make a difference. So let's just dive in. So the first thing that I recommend doing is tidying up your plants. So usually by the end of summer I am facing, and I'm sure you are too, like this messy jumble of dying plants it's just overwhelming and there's weeds woven into the tomato tangle and our enthusiasm is withering and it's just kind of a big mass of plant matter. It's very, very tempting to just leave it out there. However, if you can spend some time pulling out the dead plants, the dead vegetables, flowers, corn stocks, vines, whatever, it will make your spring tasks much easier.

Speaker 1: [05:32](#) It can also result in less pest problems because some insects do like to overwinter in that left over foliage. And if they're the bad insects, you know, you're gonna just gonna kind of start off on the wrong foot next year. Um, so that's a benefit for sure. Also, if you have any disease issues, blight, anything else you've struggling with, you definitely want to get those out. Maybe even burn them or compost them. If it's not something that will be transmittable in compost, but get them out of your garden and start fresh. We don't want that sitting there. We don't want it contaminating your seedlings next year. We want to have that blank slate. Now sometimes I do leave certain plants in the garden that are dead, right? So this is a, there's a little bit of debate around this topic because there are some good bugs that will hibernate in that debris.

Speaker 1: [06:30](#) And sometimes when you have certain plants with deeper roots leaving the roots until spring helps to aerate the soil and just

loosen everything. So what I usually do, like with my tomatoes, I always have a tomato jungle, so I'm going to pull those out and feed them to an animal or stick them in the compost pile. Now my things like Brussels sprouts or broccoli or cabbage stocks, you know, I've cut the vegetable off. Those stocks and roots are usually in the ground like concrete. They're very, very difficult to remove, at least for me. So what I'll do is I'll cut them off and leave that stump in the ground and I'll let it decompose over the winter. And then when spring rolls around, they're not only easier to pull out, but it actually aerates and loosens the soil when I do pull them out.

Speaker 1: [07:24](#)

So you're just gonna want to play it by ear. But I do recommend at least doing some tidying of your garden area before the snow flies if you get snow or the weather changes or your season is over, because I know that when spring rolls around, it's just really formidable to have to go out there and just pull out dead stuff. You know, by the ton. It's just nicer to have that done in the fall. So that's task number one. Task number two, this is optional, but it's a really good idea is to test your garden soil. Now, you can also do this in the spring, but if you do it now, it's going to give you just a head start of knowing what you need to do in the spring and potentially the amendments you will need to use for your soil. A good soil test will tell you the pH of the soil, what nutrients it contains, like potassium, nitrogen, phosphorus, iron, et cetera.

Speaker 1: [08:22](#)

Some will tell you how much organic matter you have in your soil and other information as well. It's really good to know, especially if you've been having specific issues with different vegetables, not thriving and you're not sure why. I did a soil test last year and it told me that I have low iron in some of my soil, which was why my beans and several other vegetable plants were not thriving and they were kind of this yellowish, um, sickly color. And that's exactly why. And so once I learned that information from the soil tests, I was able to amend the soil and we had no issues this year. So you can get soil testing kits, usually from different extension offices in your area. Ours we got from Colorado state university, it's not that far away. I just usually either pick up one of the little cups or you can have them mail it to you and then you can also just mail in your sample.

Speaker 1: [09:21](#)

So it's very easy. You just put some soil in the cup, send in a payment. It's usually very, very inexpensive and they will give you this beautiful little printout. Very handy. Again, you don't have to do this in the fall, but it's a great time to do it because it gives you a little bit of time to react and decide how you're

going to address any missing nutrients that the test might reveal. Okay. So that brings us to my third task that's going to be related potentially to your test if you choose to do that. And that is amend your garden soil, soil amendments, which would be things like compost or leaves or mulch or whatever else you may want to add. Sometimes they take a while to break down. So fall is truly the best time to add these amendments. So we could do a whole episode on different soil amendments and maybe we'll do that in the future.

Speaker 1: [10:20](#)

Right. Some of my favorites are well-composted manure note that I say composted not raw fresh manure cause that can cause problems. Clean grass clippings, straw mulch, old hay mulch, things like that. But there's a lot of other options as well. And the one that you want to add to your soil is going to be dependent on what your soil needs. So for me, I generally every year have added a layer of compost to every bed in my garden. But then when I got my soil tested, I learned that I had extra high nitrogen from all the compost I was adding obviously. So I decided to hold off on adding compost for a year. Now I'll probably add some more this year, but that bit of data help me from causing a problem by over composting my soil. So anyway, amend if you'd like, helps to have some data.

Speaker 1: [11:14](#)

You don't have to, but it's definitely a bonus. Okay. Task number four is adding organic compost. So this can be a soil amendment or it can be in addition to your amendments, but composting isn't as difficult as you might think. And there's a lot of information out there on how to create this perfect compost pot pile. There's a carbon and nitrogen ratio and how much moisture and how often to turn it. But really this is only a hundred percent necessary if you really want to speed up the process, you can just compost the easy slash lazy way, which is what I do. I put everything in a heap and leave it alone for awhile, like six, nine, 12 months. Nature will do what nature does, whether or not you're out there babysitting it, it just might take a little bit longer. So as a general rule, when you're composting things, whether it's kitchen scraps or yard waste or animal manure, is to keep in mind that compost material falls into two categories.

Speaker 1: [12:24](#)

We have the greens and we have the Browns. So the ideal ratio is four parts brown to one part green. I'm going to explain what they are in a minute. But like I said with my pile, I don't have as much Brown. I mostly have green cause I have animal manures so it all goes in the same place. I'm not out there measuring and weighing and it all works out just fine. So greens, so we said four part Brown too. One part green greens would be anything

that is still alive or wet such as green leaves, animal manure. Now side note use don't use manure from carnivores, right? Or omnivores. You want to use herbivore manure. So cow horse, I guess chicken manure is fine. Rabbit is great, goat is good. You don't want to use dog or cat nor obviously that's just kinda gross.

Speaker 1: [13:20](#) So don't use those. Stick with your farm. Animal manure. When I say manure, that's what I'm referring to. Um, fresh grass clippings that are not dried out yet. You could also do overripe produce in the green category or any other kitchen scraps. These green materials contain higher levels of nutrients and also have lots of nitrogen, which is the number one nutrient that people often fertilize with. So greens are really, really valuable and they tend to compost a bit more quickly. Now Browns on the other hand are just like they sound, they are dry dead material. So I'm talking fallen leaves being pods, straw, dried out, grass clippings and so on. These Browns do contain nutrients but not as much as the greens. However, why they are so important is that they contain carbon, which when that breaks down and is composted, it has a wonderful nutrient holding capacity.

Speaker 1: [14:27](#) So it holds all those nutrients from your lovely composted green matter. And it also helps improve the texture. So your compost is light and crumbly. And man when you get good compost it's like ahh. It's just amazing. It smells good, it feels good, it looks good and plants love it. So Browns will break down a little bit more slowly. So it's ideal to have a combo of the greens and the Browns, high nitrogen, low nitrogen, and they work together and make that beautiful synergistic compost. Now one little note here, some of you have heard my very sad story of contaminating my garden. So if you are going to use any sort of compost or you are composting materials, make so very sure that they have not been sprayed with any sort of herbicide. Hay is a big culprit. Straw is a culprit. Grass clippings are a culprit.

Speaker 1: [15:22](#) People are spraying things out there. Don't play with that. It can really hurt your garden. So if you're going to put anything in your compost pile, it needs to be unsprayed and or organic. When in doubt, like if the super nice neighbor wants to donate his grass clippings to you and you're not sure if they've been sprayed, like when in doubt, just say no thank you because it's not worth it. Trust me on that one. All right, task number five. And this is an optional one. I don't want you to feel overwhelmed. You don't have to do this, but it is the option of planting a cover crop. So we all know that nature abhors a vacuum, which means nature does not like blank space in your

garden. So one of the very most important things you can put on your checklist this fall is to cover your soil in some way, shape, or form.

Speaker 1: [16:16](#) There's a couple of ways to do this mulch is one or you can use a cover crop. So basically a cover crop is just like green compost that's growing in the soil. It's an actual plant and the nutrients in the plant are going to replenish the ground and prepare it for whatever you're going to grow next year. And oftentimes we plant cover crops that are very, very nitrogen rich, such as clovers or peas, um, or sometimes something like a winter barley is used. But those legumes though, the ones that are the, the peas or the Clover, the high nitrogen ones are fantastic for replenishing microbes in the soil. So it's really, really great for your soil health. Now planting a cover crop is super simple. You're just going to scatter the seeds on top of your soil just like you were out there throwing grain into the chickens, right?

Speaker 1: [17:13](#) Very simple. You don't have to overthink this. You can buy seed that is specifically for cover crop planting. One great option for this is true leaf market. I will drop a link to them in the show notes. But there's lots of different ways to do this. Lots of different options. Again, not 100% necessary, but a great option to keep your soil protected. Now whatever you decide to use for your cover crop, if you go that route, be sure that what you are planting will be able to survive the cold temps. So you get as much growth as possible before the snow comes. So that cover crop will continue to compost underneath the snow throughout the winter and keep boosting it with nutrients. So it's a little bit of a science to it, but it's definitely not difficult. Now on the flip side, if you're not into cover crops, if it's a little too late in the game for that this year.

Speaker 1: [18:10](#) Maybe next year. You can still cover your soil to protect it for the winter. The way I usually do this is with mulch and this year I am using unsprayed clean grass clippings for my cover. We have a lawn mower with a bag attachment. We do not put anything in our yard and so I am just using a nice thick layer and putting that on my beds. After I clean out any dead plants, pull all the weeds, turn off the sprinklers and then I give a nice thick mat of those grass clippings on top mulch. Whether you're using grass clippings or straw or old hay protects the soil from being washed away during the winter. It slowly adds nutrients into your soil and also helps to conserve moisture and prevent weeds from germinating. If the layer of mulch is thick enough, I would recommend going about one to three inches.

- Speaker 1: [19:12](#) Like I said, leaf mulch, that's great. Grass clippings, straw hay, wood chips are an option obviously for me, like on raised beds, I'm not going to use wood chips cause I don't want to have to take them all off in the spring. I'm using something rather that will break down that I do not have to remove, but you can definitely put wood chips in areas where you don't plan to plant in the future or even walkways for more of a permanent mulch. Oof, is your, is your brain spinning like that was a lot of information. I know, but remember you don't have to do all of them. Even if you just do one or two or even just intentionally close out the garden for the year rather than going with the ignorance is bliss mentality that I have practiced in the past. Do as I say, not as I do.
- Speaker 1: [20:02](#) I'm doing better this year though. You will definitely have a easier spring once the warm weather rolls around and don't forget as you are cleaning up the garden, make some notes, jot down some notes about what went well this year and maybe what didn't go as well or maybe things that you know you can improve for next year. I always think I'm going to remember what happened from year to year, but it's so easy for it to slip your mind when you get the seeds out in the spring and you're ready to roll. So write down the varieties you enjoyed the most, what didn't germinate as well as you would like it to. Maybe if you need to dig up your carrot soil a little deeper this year. Don't water the corn as much that's on my list or anything else that will set you up for success on your next go around.
- Speaker 1: [20:54](#) So happy fall, my friends. I hope your garden is still productive as we roll through the last bits of summer and may or winter be peaceful as we all prepare for spring. So I mentioned raised beds several times in this episode because that is what we use for our main garden. And I get a ton of questions about raised beds. So I put together this raised bed PDF guide and it just has lots of pictures of how we built ours cause they're kind of unique, not your typical raise beds and measurements and details and all that good stuff. You can grab the guide for totally free at theprairiehomestead.com/raisedbedguide. That's theprairiehomestead.com/raisedbedguide and that is it. I hope you enjoyed this episode. If you have just a minute, I would be so honored to have you subscribed to old fashioned on purpose and leave a quick review so other folks can find this podcast and bring home setting into their lives. Thanks so much for listening and I'll catch up with you next time. Happy homesteading my friends.