Closing your Summer Garden

Wellington Garden Club Meeting

Sept. 22nd, 2026

Know Your Frost Window & Timing

USDA Zone 6a, with first frost usually **mid–late October**.

- Cleanup begins **after summer crops stop producing** and finishes **before the ground freezes hard** (usually early November).
- Soil cools below **50°F** in late fall — this is the ideal time to mulch perennials without inviting voles early.



Remove Spent & Diseased Plants First

- This is the single most important step for preventing overwintering pests and diseases.
  Pull tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, beans, and squash **as soon as production collapses** or disease appears.
- Remove **all diseased foliage** from the bed — do *not* compost it.
- Clear weeds and fallen debris to reduce spring pest pressure.



Harvest & Preserve Everything You Can

- Pick remaining vegetables and herbs before frost; freeze, can, dry, or store.
- Save seeds from your best-performing plants for next year.
- When saving seeds, be aware of which plants are Heirloom. Only heirloom seeds will produce the same variety.



Replant Fast Fall Crops (Optional but Highly Useful)

- If you want a “second act” before shutdown:
- Lettuce, spinach, arugula, radishes, mustard greens mature in **30–50 days**.
- Radishes can finish in **25 days**; carrots, beets, turnips in **50–70 days** and tolerate frost.
- Count backward from your frost date (around **Oct 21** for Zone 6).

Add Compost & Reset the Soil



- After removing crops:
- Add **finished compost** to replenish organic matter.
  (I use Rooster's Organic Compost) made from chicken manure.
- Lightly loosen soil if compacted, but avoid deep tilling as it disrupts soil structure before freeze-thaw cycles.
- Water beds if fall is unusually dry (helps soil biology and fall plantings).

Plant Garlic, Onions, or Cover Crops

Garlic

- Plant **late September through mid-October** in Zone 6a.
- Mulch after soil cools below 50°F to prevent heaving.



Cover Crops

- Best sown **September–early October** so they establish before cold.
- Good choices for small gardens: **crimson clover, winter rye, oats, hairy vetch**.
- Cover crops protect soil from freeze-thaw cycles, reduce compaction, and add organic matter.

Mulch Beds — But Not Too Early

- Most beds need **2–4 inches** of winter mulch.
- **Wait until the ground begins to freeze** so you don’t create vole habitat.
- Mulch perennials, garlic, and any newly planted shrubs.

Protect Perennials, Shrubs & Tender Plants

- Newly planted shrubs need extra protection in windy, exposed yards.
- Dig and store tender bulbs (dahlia, canna, elephant ear).
- Bring in containers that can crack in freezing weather.

Leave Beds Protected, Not Bare

Bare soil suffers from:

- freeze-thaw heaving
- erosion
- nutrient loss
- weed seed colonization
- Mulch or cover crops prevent all of these