K·STATE Research and Extension | Meadowlark District

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Fall Garden Soil Prep

When you look out the window in early November and see snow, it makes you think a bit about all the things you *didn't* get done yet this fall. If you are gardener, that 'didn't get done' list might have included some garden preparation.

Fortunately, as long as soil isn't frozen, we can still get something done in the garden even in to winter. In fact, it's probably a wiser decision to do any end of season tillage now than it is to wait until spring. Soils now tend to be moist – not too wet or too dry – and are ideal for tillage. Soils in the spring? They will tend to be much more cold/wet, limiting our ability to work them easily. If you've ever tried to till your garden when it's wet, you probably remember the result: hard clods that break down very slowly. Those clods are an example of soil structure that has been destroyed, and that's a problem that isn't easily – or quickly – remedied.

While you are thinking tillage, consider adding organic matter as well. In most cases, adding a couple of inches of organic matter will suffice. If you are really trying to 'take a big swing' at changing organic matter levels, up to five or six inches can be added at one time, though it will also likely increase some variability that you may not like. For best results, shred organic matter (leaves, etc…) prior to application. Shredding increases the surface area of the organic matter that comes in contact with soil. This helps to speed the decomposition process and make it more complete.

Your garden prep window isn't closed yet, but all that takes is a long cold snap or winter moisture. Add organic matter and think about some fall garden tillage sooner than later for a better end product next planting season.

Surface Applied Lime Study

As no-till acres have increased over the last two decades, so, too, have surface applications of lime to croplands. When that occurs, one of the questions that sometimes arises is: do surface applications of lime do any good?

The short answer is yes. According to a three-year study (at two different sites) in Mitchell County by KSU researchers, a response to surface applied lime was variable, but found in corn, soybeans, and wheat to the tune of six percent, six and a half percent, and five point three percent respectively.

The study also highlighted the stratification effect that no-till can have on soil pH levels. If you've ever wondered if surface applied lime does any good, read this study in its entirety at: https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7761&context=kaesrr .