

Here are 10 “To Dos” for avid DIGgers.

1. Late seed planting

You can still sow seeds of arugula, lettuce, spinach and radish in mid September.

2. Weed

It seems silly to even mention this. If you don't extract those small pesky things now, they will be humongous by Spring and may have extended roots systems that are tough to get rid of. An ounce of prevention,...



3. Create a bird sanctuary

If you've planted flowers along with veggies, leave some (or all) of the stalks with seedheads in place. Birds that spend winter here will be happy for the food source. Perennials like black-eyed Susans, purple coneflower, asters, and liatris are tasty treats for birds to enjoy.

Put up a birdhouse. If you're handy with woodworking tools, there are plenty of free build-your-own birdhouse plans online. Chickadees, bluebirds, and small woodpeckers will use bird nesting boxes in the fall and winter to conserve heat. As well, birdhouses added to your garden now will give homes for early nesters in Spring. That means better insect control when bugs are at their peak.

4. Plant garlic

Quality seed garlic may be purchased from a local farm specializing in such produce; from reputable seed suppliers; or from your own harvest, some of which has been preserved for planting now.



Plant mid-October, well ahead of first frost date to let your garlic grow before the ground freezes. This ensures that you have a crop in early July.

Water and mulch (see below) and have patience. The cloves will start putting out roots and sometimes, weather-permitting, will put up little green shoots. Once frost arrives, the plants go dormant. A snow layer, combined with your mulch, will keep the garlic protected. As the ground warms in springtime, cloves will explode with growth. Water lightly and weed.

Come Summer, your garlic bulbs will be large and spectacularly spicy.

Check out the Veseys Seeds site for their available varieties:

www.veseys.com/ca/vegetables/garlic

5. Mulch your soil

Mulching prevents weeds from sprouting making your springtime prep easier. It also protects overwintering crops (see garlic above) from temperature extremes and prevents soil nutrients from washing away during heavy rain. It builds soil nutrients and adds texture.

These mulches work well for winter:

Autumn leaves – They decompose fairly quickly making them an ideal mulch. Avoid using leaves from walnut, hickory, butternut and eucalyptus trees, since these can be toxic to some plants. Shred larger, tougher leaves with a lawn mower. Apply a layer of at least 2-3 inches.

Straw – Not hay. Straw is the chaff from hay. Spread thickly for maximum protection.

Wood chips – These break down slowly, but will eventually add great texture to the soil.

If you're worried about wind blowing away feather-weight mulch, top it up with a thin layer of compost.

6. Keep meaningful notes and photos

Hand-written or digital, a garden journal is a great tool for next year's gardening venture. It's a diary of all you've done – what worked, what didn't.



Record dates, and descriptions of:

- Planning
- Soil amendments
- Planting
- Weather-heavy storms, periods of drought, heat or frost
- Watering
- Pests and controls applied
- Harvest quantities or lack of
- Difficulties
- Surprises

7. If you are a donator, consult with your local food bank.

What garden produce does it need most? What past donations have been appreciated and what has been poorly received (maybe kale and over-sized zucchini)? Tomatoes, onions, garlic, potatoes and herbs, are usually safe bets.

Ask. And plan next year's garden, not only for yourself, but for giving.



8. Plan your plot for next year

Get out the graph paper and make a drawing of your intended garden: one graph square equalling one square foot of garden (or a similar scaling model).

Remember to rotate your crops. That is, don't plant the same type of veggies in the same space as this past year or the year before.

Also consider companion planting. West Coast Seeds has recently published an excellent guide on this subject. Get on their mailing list or check out the website: www.westcoastseeds.com



9. Build a compost bin

There are many ways to build one.

Mesh fencing – Mesh fencing curved into a circle makes an instant bin. Use a 10 ft. length, 2.5–4 ft. tall. Fasten ends together with zip straps. Place the bin on even ground. When it's time to turn your pile, open or lift the hoop off the ground.

Plastic barrel – Drill several small holes in the sides for aeration. Once partially filled, you can roll the barrel on the ground to tumble contents.

Wooden pallets – Use four pallets the same size and fasten together at two corners using lashing or screws. Next, fasten your “door” on one side with two hinges. Set this pallet slightly higher so it will be easy to open.

Continued

10. Build a hügelkultur bed

A what?

A hügel bed is a form of raised garden bed built from layered organic matter.

A schematic image of a hügelkultur hill:

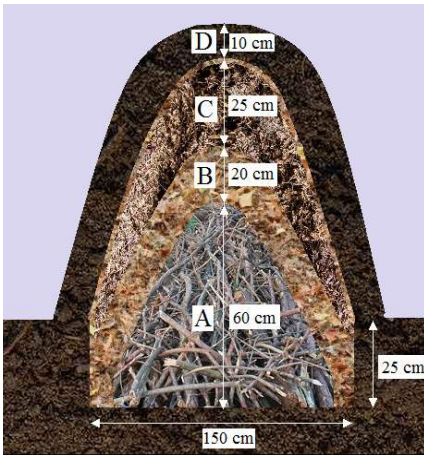
A - branches

B - leaves

C - manure/compost

D - soil.

(From Wikipedia.org)



This German-originated planting system makes use of all of nature's bits and bods, including rotting logs at the base, fallen branches, leaves, compost and soil, in that order. The permaculture term comes from the word "hill culture" in German. This frugal practice can be used to fill garden beds and planters, or just as a fun experiment to use up garden clippings. The result is a kind of berm where you will be planting on its slopes, and producing abundant crops. (The hill slopes do not have to be as extreme as the picture shows.)

Hügel bed advantages ~

Built-in fertilizer: The gradual decay of the inside organic matter provides a long-term source of nutrients for your plants.

No-till: As the wood decays, it leaves pockets of air for soil aeration.

Sponge-effect: The logs and branches inside a hügel bed effectively store water. In a well-constructed hügel, you may not need to water after the first year.

Food for microbes: The rotting wood provides the foundation for a healthy soil ecosystem that includes beneficial bacteria, fungi, insects, and worms.

DigBits

Editor	Mary Drummond
WEBSITE	www.durhamdigs.ca
EMAIL	info@durhamdigs.ca
FACEBOOK	www.facebook.com/DurhamDIGs
TWITTER	twitter.com/durhamdigs
INSTAGRAM	Instagram- @durhamdigs