

Falling Leaves and Your Garden

Did you know that Autumn and Winter preserve our soil fertility? That, without autumn and winter, our soil would soon grow weak and thin, and lose most of its nutrients?

Autumn and winter slow and stop the life process, which allows all crop and root residue on and in the soil to rot and accumulate in the soil. This “organic matter” accumulates every autumn and winter, rejuvenating the land with its nutrients, microbes, and texture. Without this yearly rejuvenation of the land, the “organic” component of the soil would simply “burn up” through constant exposure to warmth, light, and air. Crops, like tomatoes and eggplant, would keep growing and growing until they used up most major soil nutrients, leaving little fertility for the future.

Thank goodness for Autumn and Winter, the seasons of rejuvenation! Thank goodness for the slow down, for the rest. You can see it in the changing leaves, the lovely, falling, crunchy leaves that mark this most wonderful passing of time, the time of darkness, of coming home and being home, of warm soups, Thanksgiving, football, and celebration. The leaves mark the coming of the holy days.

The leaves are also a sure sign that the land is nourishing itself, that it is feeding itself and preparing for the coming spring, that it recognizes the end of another miracle we call the growing season, that it must give back. The leaves pile up and rot slowly, becoming home to a multitude of microbes eating leaves and each other. Microbes eat, eat, defecate and die, turning a pile of leaves into a whole new pile of life-giving natural fertilizer. Come spring and summer, the once-large pile of leaves has transformed into the new growth of green buds, flowers and fruit. This is the nutrient cycle.

Of course, our society has embraced many shifts and alterations to natural cycles. In our world, fallen leaves are a nuisance to lawns. We pile them up and burn them, adding chemical fertilizers to the lawn in the spring in order to make up for the nutrient drain.

Imagine a pile of burning leaves, the smoldering, warm, smoky mass, the smell of Autumn smoke, the muffled crackling. See the flames, feel the warmth. The burning you see is the release of energy, the frantic unbinding of the basic structure of leaves in the presence of oxygen and heat. Now imagine slowing this scene down, way down, real slow. This is exactly what happens in the soil when we allow the leaves to rot slowly, when we return them to the land. The act of natural microbial digestion is as powerful an impact on the leaf as the flame, except that digestion is much slower and leaves a lot of nutrients behind. Flames leave ash and smoke, which is nothing more than the release of carbon into the atmosphere. Digestion (i.e., composting or rotting) leaves carbon in the soil, where it forms our soils organic content, feeding the soil microbes for years to come. It makes the soil rich. And from our rich soil... we get tomatoes, lettuce, spinach, beets...!

I have one request: consider bringing your fallen leaves to the farm, where they are always needed for compost, fertilizer, nutrition and good health! Invest in your nutritional future!

What's in Your Share

Spinach, Scallions, Swiss Chard, Salad Mix, Celery, Turnips, Lettuce, Collards, Cilantro or Dill, Radishes, Eggplant, onion, Peppers, hot peppers... late season tomatoes...

Green Beans, Basil, and Cherry tomatoes are OPEN...

What's For Dinner:

Baba Ganoush (Roasted Eggplant with Tahini)
One last eggplant recipe for the season.

1 large or 2 medium eggplant
3 garlic cloves
¼ cup tahini
Juice of 1 large lemon
Salt
Extra virgin olive oil
Chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 425F. Slash eggplant in several places and bake until it's soft to the point of collapsing, 30-40 minutes. Allow skin to char a bit. Peel the eggplant, then puree it in a blender or food processor with the garlic and tahini. Season with lemon juice and salt to taste. Mound the puree in a bowl and make a depression in the top with the back of a spoon. Pour olive oil into the hollow and sprinkle with parsley.

Upcoming Events

Harvest Party: Sunday, November 11... Mark your calendars.

Field Work Day: This Saturday, October 20, at 9 a.m. Check volunteer board for details.

Looking Ahead

We have four weeks left after this week, and the fields continue to look great. Next week, you'll get sweet potatoes! Carrots are coming, too... and shallots, rutabega, broccoli raab, bok choy... more lettuce, fresh beets, and lots of greens...