



ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Question #1 this Week: *I have several vegetable boxes that are now cleaned up from the summer veggies we grew - mainly tomatoes. Being a relative greenhorn in terms of vegetable gardening I was wondering what, if any, tips you have with regard to winter protection for the soil. This year despite new soil and fertilizer being added at the beginning of the growing season, the outcome was not quite as good as the previous year. I am wondering what I could do to protect and improve the soil. Should I feed the soil some type of fertilizer or just wait till spring? Should I cover the boxes? Appreciate any advice you may offer – Michael*

Linda's Answer: No need to put fertilizer in the boxes now. Wait until spring. I would take some of the shredded leaves from your trees and incorporate them into the soil. Dig deep and mix in well. Put as much as you can into the soil. The leaves will decompose over the winter and add organic matter to the soil that helps create air spaces for the roots of the plants. The decomposing leaves also add valuable microbes to the soil.

In spring, add some compost and/or composted manure to your bed. It's all about getting those valuable microorganisms (fungi, bacteria, etc.) into the soil. The soil organisms eat the soil and "poop" out fertilizer for the plants to take up and grow.

No need to cover the boxes. It's important that rain water get into the boxes over the winter to help with the breakdown process. After mixing leaves into soil, cover the surface of soil with a thick layer of shredded leaves to keep the soil insulated and then turn those surface leaves into the soil in spring.

Throughout next year's growing season, incorporate more compost into your boxes to add more organic matter and microbes.

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Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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