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**Garden Tip: Prepare soil now for spring planting**

K-State horticulture expert says tilling the garden in the fall can protect the soil structure

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — One remaining chore for fall gardens includes prepping the garden for spring. Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini said now is a great time to prepare the soil.

“With drier fall weather, the soil is less likely to clump when it is tilled,” Domenghini said. “Any clumps that do form will break down over the winter as the soil freezes and thaws, leaving behind soil that’s ready to plant in the spring.”

Domenghini said working the soil in the fall also breaks down debris, contributing organic matter back into the garden.

“Debris provides a habitat for diseases and insects. Tilling it into the soil disrupts the habitat and prevents pests from overwintering and wreaking havoc on next year’s crops,” she said.

When adding organic matter into the soil, Domenghini suggests following the general rule of incorporating two inches of organic matter to the surface and tilling it in. Leaves and garden waste can be mowed first to cut it into smaller pieces that will break down more quickly.

“Well-tilled soil should have pellet-sized particles. Use caution not to over till the soil and turn it into dust,” Domenghini said.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden and yard-related questions to Domenghini at cdom@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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