

## 2017 DECEMBER vegetable garden

**-Number one priority**-Finish cleaning up your garden before the ground freezes. Add compost to it and lightly turn under. Get it ready for next season-it makes it so much easier next spring if your garden beds are ready. I would not add horse manure to it unless you know the owner and the source of the hay they feed their horse as we've had a problem with herbicides being found in the horse manure from the stables around Santa Fe.

**-Shorter daylight hours**-We will have shorter daylight hours (less than 10 hours of daylight) on Nov 28 here in Santa Fe this year. Plant growth slows way down or stops growing altogether (in effect a holding pattern). I would not plant any seeds or transplants in greenhouses, high tunnels or cold frames until we start to see the daylight hours get longer on Jan 14 UNLESS you are growing them under lights. This has nothing to do with Winter Solstice on Dec 21, which is actually our shortest day but has to do with less than 10 hours of daylight, which is about 1.5 months here. In other parts of the country further north they have a longer period of low daylight hours.

**-Weather conditions-We are in a La Niña** weather pattern and expected to continue through winter 2016-17. What does this mean? What is La Nina? La Nina conditions are where warm ocean currents off the pacific coast of South America push further north, sometimes as far as San Diego. What do ocean currents have to do with weather conditions? Everything! When ocean currents are warmer, the jet stream which comes across the US gets pushed further north to the pacific northwest and when the ocean currents are cooler, the Jetstream comes down further into the southwest which called El Nino. La Niña often creates drier than normal conditions in New Mexico, whereas the Pacific Northwest is likely to be wetter than normal in early winter this year. There is a neutral pattern that does not affect the Jetstream which means we would get a normal winter pattern-but not this year. El Nino and La Nina have nothing to do with global warming but are natural patterns. So what does this mean for us here in Santa Fe area?

**-Watering**-You'll need to Water your trees and perennials **lots more** if we don't get precipitation. It was very dry in November so water in December on a warm day. Newly planted trees can be watered once a week and I water my established trees and plants every 2 weeks. If you water with a hose, don't forget to empty it out afterward and disconnect from your hose bib. Don't worry about watering if your tree and shrubs have snow around them and the ground is frozen-the water won't soak into frozen ground.

**-Animal waterers**-If you feed birds, be sure you give them a source of water too. If my waterer is frozen, I boil water in a teapot and add it to my waterer to melt the ice. There are also electric heaters for waterers as well. If you have bees, provide them water too as they may come out on a warm day. By the way bees

don't sleep in the winter but eat their honey and pollen inside their hives and fan their wings to keep themselves and their queen warm.

**-Vermicomposting-**Don't forget to feed your worms in your vermicomposting bin! They get hungry too! Also if it has been dry, give them water on a warm day-about once a week. Don't give them so much food that it just sits there and freezes. For an outside plastic bin, maybe wrap it with a water heater blanket or surround it with straw bales to help keep the worms from freezing. For bigger outside vermicomposting areas, put straw bales around the perimeter to add insulation. Also put straw on top as insulation. I cover mine with about 8-10 inches of straw and will check them every 2 weeks to see if I need to add more food.

## **WHAT ELE CAN YOU DO?**

**- Take notes-**Write down what worked in the garden this past summer and what didn't. What were the causes for any changes? Did you plant somewhere differently or perhaps the same space? Was weather a contributing factor? Did you fertilize? Or add amendments to the soil? Think about these things. What could you do differently next year to be more successful? What specific varieties did well and which did not? I actually walked around my garden last the end of the season and wrote notes on my phone about each variety of tomatoes and how they did this past season. Then I transfer it later to my computer to keep. This helps me decide what varieties I might want to regrow for next year.

**- Catalogs-**Order your new catalogs! That way you'll have them by late December or early January. Some of my favorites are Seed Savers Exchange, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, Wild Boar Farms (tomatoes), Native Seed Search (Native American seeds), John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds (Argentata chard, shallots), Wild Garden Seeds (fantastic greens and lettuces), Kitazawa (Asian greens), Peaceful Valley and Johnny's Seeds

- Speaking of catalogs, go through those old catalogs and throw them out!

**- Research** on the internet new and different veggies you may want to try next year while you are waiting for your catalogs to come in. I always want to try something new-keeps my interest up. Start a list of possible veggies and add to it as you find more. You may not try all of them but at least you won't forget them! (I've started mine and keep adding to it) For instance, I'm going to try a Tahitian butternut this year instead of the Waltham butternut, a watermelon called Bradford watermelon which ripens earlier than many and some dwarf tomato varieties-10 new ones to be exact. I got my seeds already from Victory Gardens.

**Plan your next garden-**Take a walk around your garden and start to plan your next year's garden. Walking around when it is barren can reveal problem areas. It's hard to 'see' when the garden is going on in the middle of the season with all

the greenery. Perhaps you want to make a new bed or fix an old one or definitely plan where to rotate some of the crops.

**-Organize your garden shed.** Find all those tools you left outside-they're easy to see on the ground now that the garden is done!