Fall is a great time to consider the current quality of your garden soil, and take steps to improve, or amend, it if necessary. A good place to start is by asking yourself a few questions:

- How well did my garden produce this year?
- Was I plagued by more pests and diseases than other people in my area, including neighbors or fellow community gardeners, seemed to have this season?
- Does my garden soil look compacted?

Vegetables are plants that require relatively high nutrient levels in the soil. During the course of the season, as your vegetable plant grows and produces fruit, it uses up many of the available nutrients. Soil amendments are additions to your garden that add back some of the things that are essential to healthy plant growth and production. They can also improve the consistency of the soil with the goal of creating a better environment for roots. So while it may sound contradictory, amendments help your soil hold on to water for longer while also draining well. They help create space in the soil for air movement, but also provide enough structure that a lump of soil can hold its shape. All these things help roots to thrive.

One of the best things amendments can do for your garden during the fall is to help increase the amount of organic matter in your soil. By adding compost, aged animal manures, green manures (cover crops), or mulches you are providing food for microorganisms and other soil life, which help keep your soil healthy.

To do its work, an amendment must be thoroughly mixed into the soil. Because most soil life and plant roots are located in the top 6 inches of soil, concentrate on this upper layer.