Many garden beds are still producing as we write this newsletter, so deciding when to put your garden to bed is a personal choice. Every year will have a slightly different deadline, but keep one eye on the weather forecast for a killing frost. This is when the temperature falls below 25°F which is cold enough to kill even the hardiest of plants unless they are protected. We recommend that you complete the following steps before the ground freezes.

First of all, if you have planted garlic, make sure that you can see the markers. Then, clear away all of the dead plants, fallen leaves and spoiled vegetables. Gently till the soil to expose grubs and larvae. Spread 40lb of compost on each 8 x 4 bed. If you have a rake, or shovel, use it to “chop” the compost into the soil. Do not do this on the area where your garlic is planted—just spread it on top.

Your garden will benefit from being covered over the winter with a light mulch or some garden fabric. This prevents the soil from drying out too much and blowing away. Straw is an excellent and inexpensive mulch as it does not contain weed seeds and keeps the ground covered, but not soaking wet. Do not use hay: it is full of weed seeds! You can also use leaves and pine needles that have been shredded with a lawn mower, but they can make the soil more acidic.

If your garden really got away from you this year, and you think your soil may be full of weed seeds, all is not lost. Garden fabric, a black, woven cloth that allows air and water to penetrate, but blocks light, is available from most hardware stores for a modest price and can be used for several years. Lay down sheets of it over your garden beds and anchor it with staples or rocks. The cloth warms the soil and encourages the seeds to sprout, but the lack of light kills the plants. Leave in place until you are ready to plant and roll back like a carpet.