

A freshly fallen, first fall frost fatally froze foliage. Every leaf of the tender annuals is now history, returning back into Mother Earth. A walk through the garden clearly delineates which is hardy and who is not. Although the peppers, beans, and basil are laid low, the fall greens simply glow.

Our four acres of buck wheat cover crop quickly disappears, revealing four acres of turnips, dailcons, cabbage and kale, which all still hide the tiny crimson clover plants.

The Days before saw us scrambling. The Last of the sweet potatoes were rubbed, basketed up, hauled in to the cabin. They are sensitive to cold, being a tropical, warmth-loving plant. My house is filled with them.

Winter squash get tucked away, some in the barn, some in the cellar and the rest in side the house. Gourds and pumpkins had to be picked up from their various decorative places and put under cover. Whatever is left becomes food for the piggies.

Lettuce is our least hardy, hardy vegetable. It loves cold weather and can take a light frost. We cover it up for these first freezes; it eventually hardens off and will thrive well into November.

We use reemay, a tobacco plant bed cover that protect the crop from the frost damage. It gives us a few degree of protection, enough to get them through more beautiful, unfrosty fall weather will allow the lettuce to continue growing. We are sending in about 300 heads per week.

There are many different ways to hold the reemay down. It's called a floating row cover because it lays on the plants rather than on a frame over them. Along the edges we lay rocks, boards or anything handy we can find. My Favorite is plastic gallon pots with a shovelful of compost in them, placed every 15 or 20 feet down the row. The holes in the pots let water through. When we're done we simply dump the compost out on the garden.

Despite the flurry of activity, we pause and gaze at the stunning display of colors on the distant hillsides. Maples and Hickories splash their yellows and reds in between the still Green Oaks, Dogwoods and Black Gums offer purples and maroons, and just about every tree has some shade of the rainbow.

Once again Poppen's pickled pepper pickers picked pecks and pecks to unpickled peppers. How many? 40 bushels is 160 pecks, and they're all safely tucked away in the cave. Peppers keep well there, lasting for a least a month if not more.

With time running out, in these shorter days of autumn, there was no way to pick the beans. So we pulled the vines, laid them on a tarp or the back of the truck, and then pulled them into the cave, too. We are lucky to have a frost free zone. The beans will get harvested from the vines in due time.

Drain the pump, check the antifreeze, and several other jobs come to mind. Dusk falls as we gather enough firewood to keep warm, reminding us to sharpen the saw and start ricking it up. The sky is clear, the air is fresh and a new season is upon us.