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Winter Vegetable Bed Coverings

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This may sound a bit odd but at the end of every warm weather growing season we always covered our vegetable beds for the winter. It was usually the final act before returning the garden tools back to the basement so they wouldn?t get ruined when everything started to freeze.

Why would covering the beds be worth the effort? There were several reasons we had for doing this.

1. We didn?t plan on growing anything in the winter so it kept any growth that may pop up between now and spring down and out. That way when it?s time to plant in the ground anew the soil would simply have to be loosened up and not cleaned up.

1. It helped keep seeds either blown around by the wind or dropped by birds and other animals from getting stuck in the ground.

1. It slowed the erosion of soil after being pounded by snow, rain, and sleet for a couple of months.

Whether all of this is justified is another story but we went on these assumptions and when the coverings didn?t get lost in a storm it for the most part worked.

The easiest type of covering came from rolls of plastic. As a pretty green-minded person I try to use as little plastic as possible but if I can reuse it, as in this case, it doesn?t feel like I?m infringing on the environment too much.

In fact, there were years were I was able to use the same pieces of plastic over and over because I took good care of it keeping it in a safe place when it wasn?t needed.

It would be laid out across each bed weighed down by a bunch of heavy rocks and bricks. That way even if the plastic came undone on one side chances are it wouldn?t get away altogether.

One year we had a bunch of windows on our house replaced and I used a few to make a makeshift green house or at least a covering for seedlings in the early part of the growing season.

When the season was over I decided to used some of them to cover one of the vegetable beds; an act I later regretted. First of all, it didn?t block the sunlight, which helps prevent things from growing. Second, and more importantly, one of the windowpanes broke. Luckily it didn?t completely shatter because then I would have had immense difficulty working that soil in the future worrying about cutting myself on glass.

Finally, another season I did some major cutting back of a bunch of trees around the yard.

Instead of having the branches hauled away I asked a carpenter [1] friend to borrow his wood chipper machine and chipped them up into mulch, which I used to cover the beds. It looked really nice at first but some of the smaller slivers blew away.

I had to consolidate what was left and in the uncovered parts I laid down plastic.

Either way, covering up the beds signified my move back indoors where I would be planning out what to grow when the sun lit up the word in the spring.

Jakob Barry is a home improvement journalist for Networx.com. He blogs about green topics for pros across the U.S. like Yonkers, NY carpenters [2] and fencing contractors in Irvine, CA [3].

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