

# What To Do In Your Food Garden In December

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December is a pretty busy time for food gardeners. Not only are there plenty of things to harvest there's a lot of maintenance work to be done, and all this during one of the busiest times of the year socially! Now is not a time to start a big new gardening development project, it's all hands on the pumps!

## Keep up with the weeding.

As your summer veggies get going so will the weeds, try to give over some time each week dedicated to weeding. If a stitch in time saves nine then removing a weed in time saves ninety.

## Stay on top of the removing and training of tomato laterals.

Tomato plants put on a lot of laterals on in their growth stage in early/mid-summer, keeping up with the laterals might seem tedious but it will ease off as the plants move into their fruiting stage at the end of summer, so hang in there!



**LEFT PHOTO:** Cherry tomato pruned to four laterals. Not only do I remove excess laterals I also remove some of the leaves to allow more sun to shine on the fruit.

**RIGHT PHOTO:** I prefer to grow my tomatoes on wire mesh as the laterals can be held in place by weaving them through the mesh. This can be done much more quickly than tying each lateral.

## Apply liquid fertiliser

You should do this to all newly planted seedlings and nutrient hungry vegetables such as capsicum and celery.

## Water plants more regularly

Some suggested watering rates are:-

- **Seedlings:** Every day that is doesn't rain.
- **Onions and garlic:** Rarely in a normal season, only if conditions get really dry.

- **Corn:** Three times a week with a fairly heavy watering.

- **Tomatoes:** twice a week with a very heavy watering.

These rates apply only when experiencing normal summer weather conditions. During heatwaves water more frequently.

## Apply mulch to your beds

If you haven't already begun to mulch your veggie beds do so now. Mulching in summer reduces evaporation, stops weeds growing and provides vital organic matter to build up your soil. Also mulch around your fruit trees, and berry bushes.



**Young corn bed before and after being covered with sugar cane mulch.** Seeds sown in early-mid spring do better when planted in bare soil as soil heats up more readily when not covered with mulch but once the weather warms up it's time to apply mulch.

## Remove spring crop plants after they have been harvested

Your broad beans and peas should have finished by now. Pull them out if you haven't already done so, manure the emptied beds and either replant with short season crops like rocket, lettuce and bush beans or leave it fallow in preparation for autumn plantings of winter crops.



**LEFT PHOTO:** Pine needle mulch under raspberry bushes. Pine needles are acidic so when used as a mulch they will reduce the pH level of your soil, which is ideal for raspberries, strawberries and blueberries as they do better in acidic soil.

**RIGHT PHOTO:** Bird netting over my raspberry bushes. Instead of netting pins to hold the netting to the ground I use metal star pickets. They are much easier to put in place and remove, plus they are almost impossible to lose.

### Net berry bushes and early fruiting fruit trees

Make sure you do this before the fruit becomes ripe enough for the birds to eat. As soon as the fruit has

been harvested removed the nets before new shoots can grow through them. If the shoots get big enough they will not only make the removal of the nets more difficult they can damage the nets.

### Start summer pruning fruit trees

Contrary to popular gardening wisdom fruit trees can be pruned anytime of the year, not just in winter. I generally prune them three times a year.

- **Just before I put the nets over a fruit tree when the fruit is nearly ripe. This is done on a tree by tree basis as the fruit of each tree fruit approaches maturity.**
- **After I remove the nets.**
- **In winter time around mid-June to late July.**

In addition I will pinch out any unwanted shoots I see in the course of inspecting the trees.

### Don't forget to harvest your produce!

Get into the habit of seeing what is ready to eat in the garden and plan your meals around that food. If it is more than you can eat then freeze or bottle it. If you can't do that then give it away. Don't waste it!

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