



SEPTEMBER–NOVEMBER / LOOK AFTER THE SOIL

Cover for winter.

Mulch, green manures and leafmould for your vegetable beds

As beds empty, decide how each one will spend winter. A living crop or suitable surface cover can protect the soil. Match the choice to your next planting date, the material you have and how wet your plot becomes.

Choose a cover that fits

YOUR BED	A PRACTICAL CHOICE
Still growing vegetables	Keep the crop in place and remove competing weeds. Leave room around stems and crowns if adding a mulch; do not bury the plants.
Empty and ready for mulch	Weed first. Apply a roughly 5cm layer of well-rotted garden compost or leafmould to moist, unfrozen soil. Leave it on the surface; do not spread onto waterlogged ground.
Empty with time to grow cover	Choose a hardy green manure within its sowing window. Allow time to establish it now and clear it before the next crop. A packet suited to August may not suit late October.
Too wet to work	Keep off the bed and wait. Make notes on where water collects. Mulch is not a cure for persistent waterlogging; investigate the cause before planting.

Make your materials go further

Prioritise exposed, empty beds. Leafmould is useful when you mainly want cover and organic matter; it is not a strong fertiliser. Save woody chips for paths rather than digging fresh chips into vegetable soil.

Measure before you order

Length x width x depth gives the volume. A 1m x 2m bed covered 5cm deep needs 0.1 cubic metres, or about **100 litres**. Measure only the area you intend to cover.



WINTER SOIL / PLAN THE NEXT CROP TOO

Grow it. Gather it.

Two autumn options, plus a short winter check

Green manures for autumn

COVER CROP	TYPICAL UK SOWING WINDOW	BEFORE CHOOSING
Winter field beans	September–November	A legume: include it in your pea and bean rotation.
Grazing rye	August–November	Hardy cover, but strong roots take work to clear. Plan ahead.
Winter tares / vetch	July–September	A legume. Late September is the end of the usual window.

These are broad windows, not a guarantee. Follow the seed supplier's depth and rate, and sow only when conditions allow establishment. Colder or exposed plots may need an earlier finish. Mustard belongs to the brassica rotation.

Cut before seed sets. If digging green manure in, allow about a month before sowing or planting the next crop. For no-dig beds, choose a species and a removal method you can manage; cutting alone does not reliably stop every species regrowing.

Turn autumn leaves into leafmould

Gather fallen leaves from paths into a ventilated container or reused bag with air holes. Dampen dry leaves, label the date and leave them to break down. Check occasionally for moisture. Expect roughly one to two years, sometimes longer for tough leaves; this autumn's batch is for a future season.

Leave some leaves in quiet corners for wildlife. Keep litter and plastic out of your collection, and do not rake every sheltered patch bare.

A quick winter check

- ☐ After wind or heavy rain: check covers, paths and standing water.
- ☐ Before spring sowing: confirm when the cover crop needs removing.

[Next: Crop rotation – plan where next year's crops will go](#)