



LOUIE'S MENIFEE NOW

Welcome to the Louie's Nursery Menifee newsletter! It's the holiday season, and here at Louie's, we have everything you need to check off your loved ones' lists! Come and raid our gift shop for locally-made wares and plant-themed trinkets!

In this edition of the Louie's Newsletter, we are going to focus on being proactive during these winter months in order to prepare for a robust and thriving spring and summer garden! In zone 9, temperatures are favorable enough to begin preparing garden beds for a successful harvest, and we have all the tips and materials you need here at Louie's! Read on to get the whole scoop! Happy planting!



PREPARING RAISED GARDEN BEDS FOR SPRING VEGETABLE PLANTING IN ZONE 9

Gardeners in USDA Zone 9 enjoy one of the longest growing seasons in the country, but that also means soils can become tired, depleted, or compacted after months of use. Winter is the perfect time to reset your raised beds and prepare them for lush spring vegetable planting. With a little attention now, your soil biology will wake up ready to feed vigorous crops come March and April.



Below are the key steps, including the increasingly popular layering technique for building rich, living soil over the winter months.



1. Clear Out Spent Plants (But Leave the Roots When Possible)
Start by removing annuals that have finished producing. For shallow-rooted plants, snip them at the soil line instead of pulling them out. Leaving roots in place allows them to decompose and feed soil microbes while keeping soil structure intact.
Remove diseased plants entirely: do not compost them.



2. Loosen and Aerate Soil

Zone 9 soils often crust over or compact from irrigation. Loosen the top 6-8 inches of soil with a garden fork, gently lifting and wiggling (not flipping). This preserves soil layers and protects fungi networks while still breaking up compaction.

3. Add Soil Amendments

Winter is ideal for replenishing nutrients that will be fully incorporated and stabilized by spring.

Recommended winter additions:

- Compost: 1-2 inches of high-quality finished compost spread across the surface.
- Aged manure: Only if well composted, as fresh manure can burn roots.
- Worm castings: Excellent for boosting microbial life.
- Mineral amendments (optional):
 - Azomite or basalt rock dust
 - Gypsum (improves soil structure without altering pH)
- Organic fertilizers: Slow-release blends (like 4-4-4 or 5-5-5) can be applied now to gently break down over winter.

Spread these evenly across the top of your bed.

4. Use the Layering Technique ("Lasagna Method")

This method transforms tired soil into a nutrient-rich, biologically active environment with minimal digging.

How to Layer a Raised Bed in Winter

1. Base layer:
2. Add a thin layer of compost or existing soil to create an even surface.
3. Carbon layer:
4. Apply 2-3 inches of shredded leaves, straw, or untreated cardboard.
5. (Carbon feeds fungi and helps retain moisture.)
6. Nitrogen layer:
7. Add 1-2 inches of "green" material like grass clippings, kitchen scraps, coffee grounds, or fresh alfalfa meal.
8. Compost layer:
9. Top with another 1-2 inches of compost.
10. Final mulch layer:
11. Finish with 2 inches of straw, leaves, or wood chips.

Moisten each layer lightly as you go.

Over the winter, worms and microbes will gradually break down the layers into a deep, rich soil profile, so no tilling required.



5. Consider Planting Winter Cover Crops

Cover crops improve soil health, suppress weeds, and add nutrients. In Zone 9, winter conditions are mild enough to grow them easily.

Good choices include:

- Crimson clover (nitrogen fixer)
- Fava beans (excellent biomass, nitrogen fixer)
- Rye or oats (great for breaking up soil)

In late winter, cut the crops at the base and leave the roots to decompose. Lay the tops on the soil and cover with compost or mulch.

6. Maintain Moisture Without Overwatering

Although Zone 9 winters are mild, they can be dry. Microbial activity slows down if soil becomes bone dry. Water deeply once every 10-14 days if there's no rain, just enough to keep the soil lightly moist, not soggy.

By taking time during the winter months to restore fertility, build soil structure, and encourage microbial activity, your raised beds in Zone 9 will be primed for an abundant spring harvest. Whether you use the layering technique, plant a cover crop, or simply refresh your soil with compost and mulch, the work you do now will pay off all season long. Visit us at Louie's Nursery Menifee for all of your fertilizer and soil amendment needs this winter! 