



ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

October monthly planner of jobs to do

October has become a month that can be lovely, with a softness of light and midday warmth that is inherited from the best of September. The garden is rich with the daily intensification of the autumnal colouring but there is also a powerful sense that the season is over and the guests have all taken their things and are heading home. Nevertheless, there are still harvests to be had, both floral and edible. Frost used to be a certainty in October but is now much less likely but just keep an eye on the weather reports as it is not worth the gamble so have some form of frost protection to hand.

BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **After** a good season of growth, it's important to check tree ties. Proper tree ties should have some flexibility and won't cut into the bark, but other ties may. Loosen the ties and refix them securely. If the ties have perished replace them. It's worth checking stakes, too.
- **Make** the most of fallen leaves as leafmould should be valued as highly as garden compost. You can gather and process leaves from now until the last leaves fall in December. Leafmould will make perfectly well if you simply heap up leaves in some kind of container and leave them - but if they are very dry, they might take a couple of years. To speed the process up you can mow all the leaves to chop them up. This not only increases the surface area but dramatically reduces their volume, meaning that the chopped leaves decompose quicker and take up much less space as they do so. Leaves are broken down primarily by fungal activity so need moisture to work. If the leaves are dry, wet them thoroughly with a hose or watering can as each layer is added to the heap. Any container will do, but it should be long and low so it can be kept moist by the rain. If you are short of space - and most people are - you can still make good leafmould by stuffing the chopped leaves into a bin or old compost bag. Make sure they are thoroughly wet but puncture some holes in the base of the bag to drain excess water, fold over the top and put them to one side. Either way your October leaves will make superior leafmould by the time next year's leaves are ready to fall.
- **Cut** back, dig up and move perennials like verbena if getting too big for their space
- **Move** any outdoor pots containing alpine plants under shelter to protect them from rain - heavy downpours won't drain fast enough from containers. While the plants should cope fine with the colder temperatures that autumn and winter bring, they will struggle to survive sitting in cold, wet soil.
- **Prune** the soft tops of your roses to protect them from disease and winter frosts, and the root system from the damage that is caused by wind rock. Use sharp secateurs and orientate them with the blade side in contact with the stem for the cleanest cut. Aim for a neat shape and reduce the height by a third. Leave roses grown for their hips for as long as possible - you can finish all the rose pruning next spring
- **Go** through your pots deadheading, weeding, and cutting back soft growth. Once they are tidied, watering will be the focus throughout autumn and winter. Plants won't put on much growth so you will need to be more careful with your watering. While it's easy to overwater when it's cool and damp, in windy conditions plants dry out quickly so must be checked regularly. Avoid overwatering by looking for compost shrinkage around the edge first and then push your fingers into the top few centimetres of compost to feel for moisture. Also judge the weight of the pot if you can, many composts seem dry at the surface but stay moist around the roots. Check the compost once a week.
- **Snip** the ripe seed heads from climbing plants before you start maintenance pruning and store the seed to sow next spring. Choose a dry day and put the heads straight into paper bags. Purple clematis (*Clematis viticella*) and annuals such as Chilean glory flower all set seed now. Leave them in an open bag so they can air for a day and then remove the seeds husks. Decant the seeds into a labelled envelope and store in a tin until next spring.

- **Remove** tender half-hardy annual bedding plants such as busy lizzies, marigolds, and petunias from pots and borders now it's getting colder, with frosts on the way. These very tender plants won't survive the winter and are best put on the compost heap because, even if you can keep them frost free, their lifecycle is all but over. Tender perennials like geraniums and fuchsias, however, can be saved. Pot them up to overwinter somewhere frost free in a greenhouse or on a cool windowsill. Fill the gaps you've made outside with winter-flowering plants such as pansies, polyanthus, and wallflowers, along with bright evergreen foliage and spring-flowering bulbs like muscari, narcissus and tulips.
- **Don't** forget to collect seed from hardy perennials such as *Astrantia* and red valerian and sow straight away
- **Plant** bulbs such as crocus and daffodils in drifts across lawns or in front of borders
- **Lift** pots off the ground to improve drainage by putting pot feet underneath them. When water can't drain from the holes at the base, the air gaps in the compost fill up, the roots rot and the plant will wilt. Check your pots regularly and take care not to overwater, which will make the situation worse. Pot feet or improvised solutions like blocks will ensure that pots drain, even after a heavy downpour.
- **Pot** up and move inside tender perennials like coleus for protection over winter.
- **Put** something bright on the tops of canes to protect yourself from injury as you bend in to clear crops low on the ground. You can buy plastic caps, but old pots stuck on with modelling clay will do the trick, too.
- **Lift** and divide vigorous perennials like early summer-flowering *Ranunculus aconitifolius*. Pot them up to overwinter in a cold frame. Shoots will appear in early spring, and they'll be flowering by May
- **Lift** dahlia tubers once flowers have gone over to store for next year, or you can cut the stems down to ground level, cover with about 3 inches of compost and leave them in the ground. If a hard frost is predicted or there are prolonged frosts, you may also like to cover them with some garden fleece as added protection.
- **Cut** back hardy perennials such as the long-flowering *Geranium* 'Rozanne', which is going over now having spread itself out all summer. This light tidy-up of sprawling perennials will improve air and light around the other plants in the border and give space for winter and spring bulbs to emerge. Pruning now will also help to keep your hardy geraniums looking at their best until they start putting on new growth again next spring. Delay cutting back more upright perennials with seedheads until spring though, as they will give the garden structure, winter interest, and provide food for birds.
- **Strim** or cut long grass and wildflower areas to 10cm to help overwintering insects. Remove clippings.
- **Deciduous** shrubs such as deutzias, physocarpus and gooseberries can be propagated from hardwood cuttings now. These are easy, low maintenance and take little space, but you'll need to wait one to two years until ready to plant out. After leaf fall, select growth from this year, which should now be hard and woody. Cut into lengths of 15-20cm, each with at least two leaf joints, removing the soft tip with a sloping cut, to show which end was the top. Cut the base just below a leaf joint with a straight cut, insert into a narrow trench, with added sharp sand, 10cm apart, with one-third of the cutting above the soil.
- **Remove** and collect bamboo canes that are no longer in use. Not only will it help tidy the garden, but you can use them again next year. Brush off any dirt, saw off rotten ends and store the canes outside so the frost can kill off any pests that may be lurking inside the hollow centres.
- **Safely** store away any pots that are not frost proof to prevent them cracking in periods of freezing weather.
- **Check** your shed is waterproof and repair any damage.
- **Mow** the grass on a high setting then carry out annual lawn maintenance tasks while the ground still maintains some heat from the summer, allowing the grass to recover quickly. You'll find that you'll be mowing less and less as the temperatures drop but keep trimming the edges to improve the definition between lawn and border. Allow some air to get near the roots by raking or scarifying the moss and debris, known as thatch, left in the grass after weeks of mowing. Use a trowel to dig out the worst of the weeds and then sow the bare patches with fresh grass seed.
- **Dig** up gladioli corms to store over winter in a cool dry place.
- **Heat** treated bulbs like hyacinth are available to buy now to plant indoors for early fragrant blooms in spring. Pot up in bulb fibre. Place them somewhere cool and dark and cover with a thick layer of compost. Check them regularly and bring them into the light when their shoots are 5cm long. Bring them into a warm room once the flowers are open.

PESTS & DISEASES

- **This** is a reminder to keep checking your brassicas regularly for cabbage white caterpillars - it's something you can do whilst the weather is still warm.
- **Keep** hunting for slugs and snails in the evenings, especially in wet weather.

WILDLIFE

- **If** you stopped feeding the birds through summer, start again now so they get used to food being available in your garden during colder months ahead
- **Leave** areas with logs and leaf litter for animals to use as shelter.
- **Clean** out and disinfect nesting boxes so birds can use them for roosting in winter. Line them with dry grass to make them warmer for small birds.
- **Net** ponds to capture autumn leaves but leave small exit routes for wildlife.

VEGETABLES/HERBS

- **After** a huge glut of courgettes this year, plants are on the wane and need clearing. Harvest your last courgettes, pull up the plant and place on the compost heap. However, if your plant has succumbed to mildew, it might be best (unless you have a very hot heap) to put it in the council garden waste to be on the safe side.
- **Lift** clumps of the underground stems of mint and pot them in a standard compost and keep these on the windowsill to sprout. Leaves grown in the home won't be as pungent as outdoor leaves in summer but are useful for salads and garnishes.
- **Early** sown Brussel sprouts will already be providing you with a harvest, but for those grown later in the year, tending to them now will help you produce a bumper crop in time for Christmas. Remove any leaves that are yellow or overcrowded, keep each of the plants well-watered and stake them before they get too heavy. Remember that sprouts picked after the first hard frost will taste the best.
- **Cut** just the outermost leaves of non-hearting leafy crops such as chard, perpetual spinach, mustard, and rocket to the base. More leaves will grow from the centre of the plants and keep the middle intact. Thinning out plants will also help to improve the air and light around them. Keep them well watered to reduce the chance of them running to seed. Cold night temperatures can trigger flowering too, so putting fleece cover over the salad leaves will help protect the quality of the crop.
- **Lettuce** heads that have gone to seed can now be collected for next year's sowings. The seeds are ready to collect when the closed seedhead opens to reveal a mass of pale, fluffy hairs attached to the seed. Put a paper bag over the plant before snipping the seedheads to reduce the number lost. Let the heads drop into the bag. Once dry, the seed will separate easily from the hairs. Remove the debris and keep the seed cool and dry until spring.
- **Cut** back the ferny shoots of asparagus when they have turned yellow. Once they are no longer green, they will stop photosynthesizing and creating sugars that will benefit your plant and harvest next year. Cut the shoots back to ground level and add the chopped-up material to your compost bin.
- **Weed** and rake an area of soil to sow broad beans for an early crop next summer. Varieties such as 'Aguadulce Claudia' and 'The Sutton' can be sown at intervals from now until next April so you will be able to harvest a succession of beans starting in May next year. If you have a problem with mice eating the beans you can start them off in pots or modules before you plant them out.
- **Divide** large clumps of herbs such as lemon balm and marjoram.
- **Leave** a couple of bean pods to ripen fully for seed collecting later.
- **Cover** salad plants with cloches to prolong their harvesting period.
- **Test** to see if your pumpkins and winter squash are ripe by pressing the skin with your fingernail - it shouldn't feel as though it will pierce. Harvest them with as long a stalk as possible. Pick them on a bright, sunny day and leave them in the sun for the skin to harden further - this will help improve their storage time. If they're not quite ripe reduce the number of leaves around the fruit and slip a board under the fruits to protect them from soil moisture. Store somewhere cool and dry like an unheated spare room.
- **Store** the last of your maincrop potatoes after drying them off.
- **Cut** down the stems of Jerusalem artichokes.

TREES/SHRUBS/BULBS/FLOWERS

- **If** you have put your succulents outside during the summer its time to bring them indoors before the first frosts. This is not just to avoid frost damage or death, but also just as importantly to protect them from heavy winter rains. Succulents in general need little or no watering over the winter months. Much more damage can be done by too much water than too little. Give them a drink if they are drooping visibly - and then just a little. In mid-spring, they can have a good deep drink, to recharge their cells with the water that they can draw upon as they need it.
- **Plant** spring bulbs in pots - scillas, muscari and dwarf irises.
- **Keep** on deadheading dahlias, to encourage the last blooms to open.
- **Get** ahead by sowing sweet peas now. This will give you a longer flowering season next year, as well as more and earlier flowers. It also means that the plants will have stronger root systems and better tolerance of droughts. Use deep pots to encourage longer, healthier roots.
- **Collect** the seeds of *Euonymus europaeus* so you can propagate a native hedge. The seeds will remain dormant until they've been stratified (exposed) to winter's cold temperatures, so sow them straight outside - protected from vermin - or recreate the temperatures needed to break their dormancy by popping them in the fridge. Be sure to wash your hands after handling the seeds as they are toxic.
- **Order** bare-root trees and shrubs to plant between now and spring, avoiding December and January. Bare-root plants are cheaper to buy than pot grown and have root systems already used to grow in open ground. Make sure the ground isn't too hard or waterlogged when you plant them.
- **Dig** up young shrubs to move into a new position. They may need more space, different light levels or just look better elsewhere. Choose a mild day with little wind to prevent the plant from drying out. Unless the shrub is very compact, trim back any wispy shoots and tie up the rest into the centre with a long piece of soft cloth to avoid damaging low horizontal branches. Dig it out with as large a rootball as possible. Water the rootball if it is particularly dry and get it to the new site without delay. Water the base of the new hole; add bone meal to help the roots into growth, then backfill, treading the rootball in firmly. Take off the ties if you used them.
- **Lift** and divide any overcrowded perennial plants, replanting the youngest material.
- **Plant** wood anemone rhizomes in a shady part of the garden, ideally in rich soil. Planted in drifts, these delicate, dainty plants make a lovely carpet and are among the earliest to flower in spring, bridging the gap between snowdrops and bluebells.
- **Cut** back any unruly side branches of trees like rowan to keep the head neat and upright. Make clean cuts either right back to the base or immediately above an outward facing bud to avoid branches crossing over each other in the next growing season. If you can shred the pruning's, before adding them to the compost heap. Make sure you use clean secateurs to reduce the risk of disease transferring from plant to plant. This light prune may not be needed every year.
- **Changing** from green to yellow, orange and then brilliant red, *Arum italicum* berries contain large white seeds within their sticky flesh, which you can sow to increase your stock. Wearing gloves to avoid touching the sap. Place the berries in a sieve, squeeze out the seeds and sow in a pot of seed compost. Sprinkle with gritty compost to cover. Leave to germinate in a cool, sheltered spot and pot up individually as they grow.
- **Plant** out wallflowers ready for spring. Their roots need plenty of time to develop well.
- **Dig** up, divide, and replant large clumps of lily of the valley.

FRUIT

- **Now's** the time to pick late-ripening apples such as 'Golden Delicious', 'Laxton's Superb', 'Idared' and 'Spartan'. The earliest apple varieties are ready in August, so if you have more than one tree you could be picking for several months into the autumn. A ripe fruit will come away from trees easily if you cup the base and give it a light twist. Put the fruit carefully into a picking basket without bruising them, particularly if you plan to store them. Apples on the ground are either ripened already or have dropped due to pest or disease damage. Collect those windfalls separately as they will be less able to store, but they may still be good for eating or juicing.
- **Remove** the large fruits on fig trees that haven't yet ripened.
- **Harvest** the last of the pears and autumn raspberries.

GREENHOUSES/COLD FRAMES

- **Check** for pests on any plants brought inside to overwinter
- **Check** windows and doors for drafts and seal any gaps with old material
- **Keep** glass panels clean to improve light levels as daylight decreases.
- **Remove** dead plants or leaves to prevent those harbouring pests and diseases.
- **If** you have not already installed a water butt to catch rainfall from your greenhouse, this is the time to do it.
- **Clear** all the debris from greenhouse guttering to keep rainwater flowing efficiently. Also wash the outside of the glazing to reduce fungal spores collecting in your water butts. Clean inside your greenhouse too - sweep the floor, wash pots, and scrub benches and glazing bars with outdoor disinfectant to remove pests such as red spider mites and mealy bug, which hide in crevices over winter. You may also find hibernating snails in pots or attached to benches.

HOUSE PLANTS

- **Reduce** watering on indoor plants but give citrus a balanced winter feed through to March
- **Windowsills** can become a cold and draughty place in autumn, while the rest of the house can turn into a hot, arid oven thanks to central heating. Plants from tropical climes will suffer in these extremes, while those situated above a radiator are likely to shrivel. It's a good time to move them and check on overall plant health. Check regularly for infestations of mealy bugs, aphids or scale which will only diminish their vigour as plants are trying to adapt to their new conditions. Boost them with SB Plant Invigorator (from £4.99 for 500ml spray). Boost light levels by ensuring those plants that need sunlight get as much of it as possible by cleaning windows and checking they're not in a draught. Wipe plants leaves with a cloth and spritz with fresh water. Snip off damaged leaves to tidy up. Cacti and succulents need watering only about once a month, while others need a small amount once a week.