



ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

November monthly planner of jobs to do

We have become seduced by an Americanised Halloween, but the important date is Bonfire Night - 5 November. This is when the year slips away. In fact, nowadays, the best autumnal colours are often around this first week - thanks to climate change - but it is a dying flourish. The leaves come streaming from the trees and the garden grows damp and cold and clammy. It is time to tidy up after the party and hunker down. Autumn may be declining into winter, but the garden does not give up without a fight.

BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **By** November you can no longer risk leaving any tender plants outside to be caught by the first sharp early frost. A heated greenhouse is the best place for them, with the thermostat set at 7°C, but do remember to radically reduce watering especially potted plants like citrus, pelargoniums, and fuchsias, and do not feed them at all so they can slow down and rest over winter.
- **Service** your secateurs, cleaning and sharpening them with wire wool and a knife block.
- **Fill** any gaps in your borders with winter-flowering plants such as hellebores, heathers, sweet-scented evergreen *Sarcococca*, and bulbs like snowdrops that can be bought in pots for instant colour.
- **If** you grow exotics in pots, but don't have a frost-free place to overwinter them, protect them with fleece now. Banana plants, cannas and tree ferns all need winter protection. The crown of the plant is the most important bit to protect, so peg or tie the fleece so that it covers the canopy. The roots are also vulnerable in freezing conditions, so wrap up the pot in plastic bubble wrap.
- **Protect** seedlings sown this autumn, such as nigella or marigolds, before frost sets in. A cloche made of plastic or light fleece will prevent rain and cold winds from causing damage throughout winter. This will not only prevent young plants from getting soaked, but also the small amount of heat retained by the material should keep plants warmer. You will need to water the plants occasionally by hand once they're covered up. Any sown into pots should be brought inside.
- **Bulbs** such as Hyacinths, *Narcissus* and *Hippeastrum* are traditionally forced for Christmas flowering by being kept cold and dark for around 10 weeks. They then take another three weeks to flower. The timings are specific to the plant, so do some research first. It's not too late to start off some now to flower in early spring. Check regularly and water a little if they dry out. When the shoots are 5cm they are ready to bring into the light. Too much warmth straight away distorts the blooms so bring them into flower in cool, light conditions before displaying them inside.
- **Cut** climbing roses back to the main framework and tie in new shoots.
- **Prune** back any fading herbaceous perennials not being left for over-wintering wildlife.
- **Don't** forget to collect seed from hardy perennials such as *Astrantia* and red valerian and sow straight away
- **Trees** are tied to supporting stakes for a few years after planting. The stem girth expands rapidly, so check the ties and loosen them at least once a year to stop the tie constricting stem growth or the movement of fluid from the roots to the upper parts of the tree. It's a good idea to remove the ties completely to wash off any wintering pests. Secure the tree back to the stake, adjusting the tie to allow for next year's growth.
- **Leafmould** makes the best soil conditioner, but it takes two years to form. The rotting fungi and bacteria need moisture and air so open heaps are best, but bagged leaves work well in a small space.
- **Regularly** clear fallen leaves from lawns and ponds.
- **Treat** red thread on lawns with fungicide and plan a care regime for next year.
- **Sow** seed of hardy shrubs and trees. Leave the trays outside.
- **Avoid** walking on lawns that are either waterlogged or frosty. If you need access, make a temporary path with wire-covered planks.

- **Hard** prune any deciduous hedges that need it, and prune mixed native hedging to keep it in bounds
- **Carry** out major pond clearances but leave some original water for existing wildlife.
- **In** recent years, more severe winter weather, particularly snow, has arrived well after Christmas, allowing us to get many tasks completed, but there is always a chance of a whiteout. Upright and cloud-pruned conifers need protection from breakage and limb damage in the event of heavy snowfall. A technique involves using sturdy hop string. On cloud-pruned trees attach the string to a bare stem just below a conifer 'cloud' and wind it round the stem opposite, repeating this to create a cross-brace structure to support the limbs. Spiral hop string all the way up the height of upright conifers to keep the branches together and protected until spring.
- **With** borders and veg beds naturally clearing at this time of year, it's a great time to improve your soil by mulching it. Try to put on a layer roughly 5cm deep and use organic matter, such as garden compost. You can also buy soil improvers, such as spent mushroom compost, in giant bags that are delivered to your home, so don't worry if you haven't made much garden compost
- **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 gladiolus 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.
- **Winter** cuttings are known as hardwood cuttings because although you use the newest shoots, they have hardened ready to withstand the winter weather. They are the easiest cuttings, made from a thick, single stem with a bud on the top and bottom. Blackcurrants and gooseberries root easily as do shrubs such as *Buddleia*, *philadelphus*, *Spiraea* and *Weigela*. Root them in a sheltered spot with free draining soil outside or in a cold greenhouse. Press them into the soil or compost by two thirds of their length. Cuttings will root over winter and will be large enough to transplant or pot on next autumn.
- **Moving** parts will seize if they are just left in the shed at the end of the season, so service garden tools now ready for next year's work. Brush or wash off any plant debris, then dry and lubricate all the moving parts. For safety, take the spark plugs off petrol driven machines before cleaning or replacing air filters, changing the oil, or removing the blade for sharpening or replacement. Mowers, strimmer's, and hedge-trimmers get the most use and should be serviced every year. Garden machinery stores provide this service if necessary.
- **Weeds** may not be top of your list at the moment, but it's a satisfying time of the year to remove them, as unlike in spring they won't be back again seemingly overnight. Only hoe on dry days or the weeds could re-root. Weeding by hand is the most effective method at this time of year.
- **Bring** hoses indoors before the frosty weather causes ice inside them that can rupture the pipe. The same applies for pressure washers - make sure they're stored in a frost-free place.
- **If** things are looking a bit bare on the patio or by the front door, plant up some pots for winter interest with bedding plants, such as cyclamen, ivy, and violas. Add a few bulbs for spring colour too.
- **Cordless** tools' lithium-ion batteries don't like to be fully discharged, so charge them after use and top them up over winter.
- **Clean** tools straight after use before you put them away, clean off any debris and put them in a dry shed or garage to avoid rusting also water getting into motors and engines.
- **A** good job to warm you up on a chilly day is emptying out the compost bin and then putting back the contents. This will help speed up the decomposition process and mix up the contents so there are no layers in the heap.

PESTS & DISEASES

- **When** wild sources of food begin to run out, small mammals move from hedgerows and woodlands into gardens to forage for food. The resulting damage to plants can be catastrophic. Keep out rabbits by constructing a fence with a wire mesh dropped 60cm below ground level to stop them burrowing. Direct protection such as netting over bulbs, seeds and the bark of vulnerable trees is the only way to stop squirrels.
- **Spray** peaches now against peach leaf curl.
- **Slugs** can be a problem if the weather is mild and wet. Control them by removing them by hand or using organic slug pellets
- **Canker** on apple and pear trees is easier to see now the leaves have dropped. Cut off any infected areas and bin or burn them.
- **Woolly** aphids that appear on apple trees can either be scrubbed off with a brush and water with a drop of washing-up liquid added or sprayed with a winter wash.

WILDLIFE

- **One** of the greatest gardening pleasures is watching the birds come to feeders placed around the garden. You should provide a range of treats for them, including sunflower seeds, fat balls, nuts, and grain. Also provide a shallow dish of water which should be kept topped up and unfrozen during cold weather. The important thing to remember when feeding birds is that once you start, you need to keep up a regular supply. During cold spells and when other sources of food are scarce, the birds will expend valuable energy flying to the feeder, which is wasted if there is nothing for them when they arrive. It is better to provide a smaller but constant supply than an irregular burst of largesse.
- **Prepare** nest boxes ready for next spring's nesting activity. If you leave them, pests such as mites can build up and affect the young chicks, so clean the box by brushing out the old nest material. Sterilise with boiling water, but don't use any cleaning chemicals. Nest boxes rot over time, so make sure the perches are secure, the structure is good, and the roof is watertight before fixing back into place. Birds explore potential sites early so get this done now to gain feathered residents next spring.
- **Before** lighting a bonfire check the heap for hibernating toads, hedgehogs, and other animals.

VEGETABLES/HERBS

- **Pick** the last chillies and leave on a sunny windowsill to ripen.
- **You'll** be right at the end of the tomato picking now, and there may be a few chillies left to harvest, but over winter the late salad leaves come into their own. If you have rocket, mustard, mizuna or cress, pick outer leaves to keep them going through the cold months. You can also try sowing cress and rocket under cover now as they germinate at low temperatures, as do peas for fresh sweet pea shoots in your salad. Pot-grown herbs will keep up the supply too. Top them up with pots from the supermarket.
- **If** you sow some broad beans now, they'll be ready to eat in May, a few weeks ahead of those that are sown next February or March. The seeds will germinate, and the small plants will overwinter in all but the harshest winter conditions. Sow seeds 15cm apart in wide, 5cm-deep drills. Water them after sowing and then put supports in place for next spring.
- **Parsley** gives the most reliable supply of fresh herb leaves all winter. Use a cloche cover or fleece on the veg patch to keep the leaves in top condition. Harvest from the outside and discard the yellowing shoots. Add chopped parsley leaves to soups and stews, pasta dishes and even winter salads. The plants will dwindle in spring when they start to flower, so freeze a few bunches in polythene bags for a continued supply.
- **Rhubarb** should be divided every 5 years or so and now is the time to do it, also you can plant new rhubarb crowns now. Add compost to the soil, water the crowns well and keep them at soil surface when they are planted - they are likely to rot if completely buried. It's a good idea to allow the plants to strengthen for a year before picking the tasty young shoots the following spring.
- **Check** your brassica crops of Brussels sprouts, cabbages, and cauliflowers, and nip off any yellowing or yellowed leaves. This will help to prevent the development of fungal diseases such as brassica downy mildew and grey mould that could spread and destroy your harvest. Snap off cauliflower leaves at the base and use them to cover the curds to protect them against the cold, until you are ready to pick them.

- **Sow** hardy pea varieties by mid-November for early summer crop in an unheated greenhouse, either in pots or the soil border. Choose hardy varieties such as Feltham First, Meteor and Mange Tout Oregon Sugar Pod.
- **Dig** up chicory for forcing, cutting off the foliage and growing on in a dark, warm place.
- **The** young tender spears of asparagus emerge in April and, on mature beds, are harvested until June. Newly planted beds are harvested over lengthening time year on year until they have the energy to be cropped for many weeks. Keep the bed well fed, weeded, and pick off asparagus beetles in spring.
- **Cover** brassicas with fleece or netting to protect against pigeons.
- **Plant** autumn onion sets, shallots, and garlic but not if soil is frozen or extremely wet.
- **To** make harvesting of root crops easier cover with straw to prevent soil freezing.

TREES/SHRUBS/BULBS/FLOWERS

- **Tear** off suckers at ground level from ornamental trees.
- **Rose** specialists grow their plants in the field and lift them when they are dormant. These bare root plants are cheaper than pot-grown ones. They are light and easy to send via mail order to customers. As soon as they arrive, plant them into a well-prepared hole up to the soil mark so they are at the same depth as they were at the nursery.
- **Lift** cannas, potting them up to store in a frost-free place.
- **Plant** up pots of winter bedding, such as bellis, wallflowers and pansies.
- **Tulip** bulbs offer the opportunity to provide a colour theme for your spring garden. Planted in pots or among border plants they make a vibrant addition to your early flowering display. Choose a mixture of early, mid, or late season performers to spread the flowering season. November is the best time to plant tulips as frosts will have reduced the risk of tulip diseases that persist in the soil. The roots develop in the coldest months so after planting, water well and then leave them to the elements.
- **Prune** birches, walnuts, and laburnum - they may bleed if cut after midwinter.
- **Water** recently planted evergreens during dry spells - they can still dry out, especially during windy weather.
- **When** frost has blackened dahlia foliage, it's time to cut the stems back to ground level. Chop them up before putting them on the compost heap so they'll rot down better. The tubers can either be lifted for storing in a frost-free place or left in the ground, where they should survive as long as we don't get a very wet or cold winter. Mulching the tops with compost or leaves will help protect them in the ground.
- **November** is a good time to start to prune many deciduous trees and shrubs. Their leafless structure makes it easier to see what needs to be done.

FRUIT

- **Most** specialist nurseries supply young trees lifted straight from the field once they are dormant. The season lasts from November to February but the longer you leave it, the less choice of varieties you'll have. Most bush and tree fruits in this form will be ready to crop a year after planting. Prepare a weed-free site, add garden compost to the planting hole and drive in a stake for support. Use a mycorrhizal fungus on the roots before planting to improve establishment. Firm the soil around the roots, then water, mulch and guard against deer or rabbit damage in exposed gardens,
- **Prune** blackcurrants, cutting oldest shoots down to the ground.
- **Prune** apples, pears, medlars and quince.
- **Its** time to pick the last of your apples. Bring them in and go through them looking for damaged fruit. Only select the perfect ones for storing somewhere cool and dark. They will last longer when wrapped individually in paper. Use all the blemished fruit as soon as possible. Late ripening apples tend to have firm flesh, which is great for cooking, so use them in pies or desserts or cook and freeze the pulp for use at the end of the season.
- **Put** grease bands on fruit trees to trap winter moths, they should be placed about 45cm above soil level and left in place until April.
- **Spray** peaches against peach leaf curl

GREENHOUSES/COLD FRAMES

- **As** natural light levels drop, let in as much light as possible by regularly clearing leaves and debris from the greenhouse roof. A long-handled broom will do the trick - brush them down from the ridge towards

the gutter. Wear gloves to run your hands along the length of the gutter, scooping out the leaves as you go. Make sure leaves don't block the down pipes that fill water butts. Blast a hosepipe down them to be sure and collect any debris that falls into the butt.

- **Clean** pots, propagators, and seed trays ready for using again in the spring.
- **Insulate** an unheated greenhouse with bubble wrap to ensure it is kept frost free.
- **Replace** any damaged panes of glass before the winter weather sets in.
- **Water** overwintering plants sparingly.
- **Sow** seeds of hardy annuals in the greenhouse for an early display.
- **Now** that the days are cooler, heaters are a good way of protecting tender plants. Use a max-min thermometer to monitor temperatures so you know when to turn on the heaters. You'll just need heat at night to begin with. Electric fan or tubular bar heaters are the easiest if you have power, if not, the options are paraffin or gas. Paraffin heaters are cheap to run but need regular filing and maintenance, while propane gas heaters are expensive but efficient. Insulate the greenhouse with bubble polythene or plastic sheeting to help reduce heat loss.
- **The** combination of low light, cold temperatures and high humidity after watering makes the perfect condition for fungal rot. Reduce the risk of this disease by regularly going through your plants. Picking off dead or yellowing leaves. Deadhead old flowers and space plants out as much as possible. Water sparingly and ventilate when temperatures allow. Clear up the plant debris from the greenhouse and put it on the compost heap.
- **Pot** up or plant into soil borders or grow bags September sowings of greenhouse lettuce.

HOUSE PLANTS

- **If** your houseplants are looking a bit tired and weary of life, then don't wait for spring to divide and replant them to make new ones. What's more, with Christmas just around the corner, they will look much more decorative, and you can even give away any extras as presents. The peace lily (*Spathiphyllum wallisii*) is a good example of such a plant. Handsome of habit and generous with its flowers, it's enormously tolerant of every indoor situation, from bright indirect light to relative gloom. Only scorching sunlight will cause it to suffer. It can also form a dense clump quite rapidly, filling its pots with fibrous roots. These are tough enough to withstand quite brutal division - although you'll probably need the help of a kitchen knife.
- **Five** easy houseplants are: **Aloe vera** a sun loving succulent with skin-soothing sap. **Moth orchid** flowers for months on end; water sparingly. **Rubber plant** a glossy, leathery-leaved retro favourite. **Spider plant**, very tolerant, forms a cascade of baby plants and **Swiss cheese plant** famous for its large, holey leaves.