



ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

September monthly planner of jobs to do

September is above all the month of harvest, as anyone with an allotment or veg plot knows that this is the month of gathering in produce, some to eat fresh, such as courgettes and kale, but much (apples, pears, and chillies) to process and store for winter. The days can still be hot, so ripening is good, but they are becoming drastically shorter with the sun slipping lower and lower in the sky and, although this results in some of the most beautiful light of the year, it means the nights are longer and colder, so growth is slowing right down. The mature is not being replaced or renewed and the old is slipping elegantly into autumnal decline. The right response is not regret but to gather in your harvest and celebrate its abundance and all the work of the year - preferably with feasting and libations but, failing that, with a freezer full of good things for winter.

BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **Sow** fresh grass seed on bare patches in the lawn after forking over and raking the soil.
- **Divide** vigorous clump-forming perennials now to rejuvenate their growth and fill borders for next year. Those that flowered earlier, such as Alchemilla and Geraniums, can be split now. Clear the ground of weeds before replanting. Lift the clump out of the border with a spade. Split it into pieces by pulling it apart or driving a spade into the middle. Plant the freshest sections back into the border, firm them in well and give them a good long soak.
- **Add** deadheaded flowers and trimmings to the compost heap in alternate layers with woody waste. Avoid composting seed heads from prolific self-seeding plants.
- **Start** planting winter bedding in gaps as you cut back summer flowers.
- **Stake** tall blooms with canes so you can enjoy their beauty for longer.
- **Make** supports for asters, to keep them upright as they get taller.
- **Tidy** large areas of spent perennials quickly by trimming them back with sharp shears, then raking off the debris for the compost heap. This method works well for tough plants like hardy geraniums and those in the daisy family. Don't do this with plants that will suffer dieback if not cut back to a leafy joint.
- **Prepare** ground to plant new perennials now, by removing all weeds. The soil temperature retains the summer warmth for several weeks so there is plenty of time for plants to root out and establish before they become dormant for the winter. Cooler day temperatures and the start of the autumn dews are perfect stress-free conditions for plant establishment. Make sure they are watered if it's dry and put some mulch around them to protect the new roots.
- **Keep** snipping off blooms that have gone over to encourage more late flowers. Your tubs and baskets full of tender plants and annuals have another month or so to go and will keep flowering.
- **Organise** your seeds saved from the garden so that they store well and keep their viability for next year. Seeds from husks and pods must be dry before putting in labelled paper envelopes. Store the envelopes in a tin kept away from light, heat, or frost for the winter. Sow these in the spring. Berried seeds, and seeds of hardy trees and shrubs, can be sown into pots now and put outside for winter cold to trigger spring germination.
- **Reduce** the amount of water you give containers this month. Growth is slowing and fungal rots are more likely with lower light levels and a chill in the air. Improve airflow by removing old, damaged leaves then snip out the stems that have finished flowering. Look out for weeds hiding at the base of plants and remove these too.
- **Plant** bulbs in the lawn now to enjoy a meadow of spring flowers for years to come. Known as naturalising, this method creates natural-looking colonies of flowers that multiply to give pretty swathes of blooms. These flowers attract pollinating insects, and the longer grass gives great habitat for many other wild creatures. You can choose a mixture of flowers or go for a striking mass of one

type. Snowdrops, crocus, and daffodils do well in early spring followed by camassia, chionodoxa and dwarf tulips, which make a great display. Plant in distinct areas and mow paths so that you can walk among the flowers. It takes about six weeks from flowers going over until it is safe to cut the grass for the rest of the summer. If you cut the bulb foliage off before the leaves have died back, the bulbs will lose energy and put on a poor display next year.

- **Check** stored bulbs and tubers and throw away imperfect ones.
- **Prepare** for an early flowering display by sowing hardy annuals such as nigella into pots now, Harden them off and plant out in spring, when they will flower earlier than anything sown directly into the ground. Hardy annuals will stand a bit of cold, so they can go out earlier than other annuals.
- **Cuttings** taken in midsummer can be potted up now. Hold up the pot and check the holes at the bottom to see if roots are visible, before gently knocking out the plants to pot on. Any that haven't rooted should be left until next spring. Mix some grit into 50:50 mix of John Innes No.2 and peat-free compost. Pot each plant individually into a small pot and pinch out the soft tops to encourage more shoots to grow from below.
- **Clear** fallen leaves from your wildlife pond before they sink to the bottom and start to rot. Skim them off the surface gently with a net or lawn rake. Try not to create too much water movement as it will cloud the water and encourage more algae growth. Take the leaf litter from the margins and amphibian beach where the water level can rise. Check for bugs and if you find any, put them back where they were. Leave the marginal plants in place for the winter; they give valuable cover to a range of creatures. Net the pond and catch and compost the leaves.
- **If** your lawn is looking tired you can bring it back to health in a few easy steps. First mow, then rake out moss, before mowing again and spiking with a fork every 15cm. Finally, apply an autumn fertiliser before topdressing with turf dressing
- **Complete** conifer hedge trimming ideally by the end of the month.
- **Sow** a new lawn now while the soil is still warm and the seed will germinate in about a week. Seed is much cheaper than turf so, if you prepare the ground well, you'll save money, and the grass will grow and thicken enough for you to mow before the winter sets in. Forking through the soil should be enough but if your soil is heavy and poorly drained, dig first to improve drainage. Leave it to settle a little longer before sowing. Ensure the ground is level and weed-free. Apply bonemeal fertiliser and rake to a fine tilth. Weigh out the seed and scatter half over the whole area, then go back over with the other half to make even as you can, then water with a fine rose or sprayer, being careful not to disturb the seed, then water again in a few days if it dries out.
- **Trim** your formal hedges now to give you a neat shape that lasts right through the winter. The birds have finished nesting and the hedge has a few weeks of recovery before the temperature drops. Lay a tarpaulin on the ground to catch the clippings and start on the hedge sides, working up from the bottom. If you need to get high to trim the top, use a platform ladder and, for safety, only push trimmings to the ground once you've put the shears or hedge trimmers down.
- **Collect** garden waste in a compost heap or bin. The heap needs air, moisture, and a mixture of green and brown waste. Stack the waste you've collected, adding a few handfuls of soil to start it with soil microbes and try adding manure or nitrogen fertiliser to feed the bacteria that rot it down. Water it then cover with polythene or a tarpaulin. If you build it now and cover it for the winter, it will turn into compost by next year. Chopped up waste decomposes faster and turning the heap speeds it up too.
- **The** combination of blight and moth has made hedges a bad bet for most people. But yew is increasingly being regarded as a good = perhaps the best - substitute, even for quite low hedges. It also makes the most magnificent green backdrop to any border. There is a misconception that yew is slow to grow but it will steadily put on 15-30cm a year until very mature and grows appreciably faster than box. You can increase your stock of plants by taking cuttings at any time from August to January, although the best time is always just before the annual trim. Choose good straight stems, about 10-22cm long, and strip off the foliage at the bottom. Plant the stem in pure perlite or very gritty compost. You can also take smaller cuttings by pulling away side-shoots, each with a 'heel' of the main stem and put them all around the edge of a pot or individually into plugs. They will start to root and grow next spring, and can be potted on in autumn, and should be ready to plant into position in 3-4 years!
- **There** is still time to sow green manure to dig in later to improve the fertility and structure of your soil.
- **Lift** and divide congested rhubarb plants.

- **This** is the month when most of the catalogues from the main seed suppliers drop through the letter box. Choosing seeds is a job to look forward to every year. First look at the seeds left from the previous season to see if they are still usable and not too old then decide what you still need to order. Most seeds will keep a year or two if they are kept dry. One exception being parsnips which should be bought fresh every year. Always keep your seeds in an airtight container in a cool dark place away from sunlight.
- **Weeds** are still growing in early autumn - make sure you keep on top of them, so they don't get chance to set seed and spread. Hoeing works well on a dry day, as weeds dehydrate, wither, and die, otherwise dig them up by hand.
- **As** crops go over, cover the resulting bare soil. Spent mushroom compost, garden compost and green waste all work well. There's no need to dig it in, as the worms will pull it into the soil.
- **Any** controlled-release feed that you mixed into the compost of your patio pots and baskets at planting time will have run out of steam by now, so keep the show going by giving your plants a weekly liquid feed.
- **Look** out for self-seeded biennials, such as foxgloves and columbine, and move them to places where you can better enjoy the flowers next year.
- **Choose** a patch in full sun to sow a cornfield wildflower mix. Seeds sown in autumn will start to flower next May and continue for many weeks.

PESTS & DISEASES

- **Cut** all the foliage from blight-infected potatoes with secateurs. You'll see the tell-tale signs of large, dark brown and black blotches on the stems and leaves. This fungal disease spreads rapidly in warm, damp conditions to move down into tubers and rot those too. Harvest the crop as soon as you can and keep an eye on your tomatoes as they are also prone to blight
- **Slugs** and snails lay small round translucent eggs containing their offspring several times a year when it is warm. If you find them, remove them from the soil or foliage and place them on the bird table to feed your garden flock.
- **Areas** of sunken, swollen, cracked or distorted bark on your apple or pear trees are a sign of canker a fungal disease. Infected areas or branches should be cut out and destroyed.
- **If** you notice birds pecking at your lawn, they could be after leatherjacket grubs. These are laid in August by daddy long legs and hatch a few weeks later, ready to eat grass roots and leave dying patches in the lawn. They're about 2.5cm long and greyish in colour. A biological control works well. They're a live product and are usually bought online from a specialist supplier, such as www.gardening-naturally.com These should be applied to a moist lawn and then thoroughly watered in after application.
- **Codling-moth** caterpillars burrow into apples in the summer. To try to prevent this happening next year, you can apply a biological control to the tree trunk from September to early October
- **Powdery** mildew often affects both ornamental and edible plants in early autumn. You can use a fungicide on ornamental plants, but there are none available for edible plants. We recommend watering plants regularly as a way of preventing the disease.
- **Box** blight causes devastating damage to box. The best advice is to dig up infected plants. Alternatively, cut back affected areas to healthy growth as soon as you spot die back.

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
- **Help** hedgehogs to build up energy reserves before they go into hibernation by leaving out meat-based cat or dog food or special hedgehog food.
- **Clean** out nesting boxes so birds can use them for roosting in winter. Line them with dry grass to make them warmer for small birds.
- **Delay** mowing all your longer grass, so it can shelter wildlife as the weather gets colder.
- **There** is still time to make an insect hotel for winter. Your hard work now will pay dividends next spring.

VEGETABLES/HERBS

- **Rake** an area of weed-free ground to a fine tilth, ready to plant onion sets. Sets are small onion bulbs that crop quicker than onions sown from seed. They can be planted now, or in the spring (depending on

variety), though autumn planting will get you ahead. Try winter-hardy varieties such as 'Radar', 'Electric', 'Senshyu', 'Sturon', 'Tornado' and 'Shakespeare'. Plan to make sure you have blood fish and bone meal to apply when they start into growth next spring. Water if it's dry and they'll plump up ready for harvesting by June next year.

- **Stake** and earth up taller winter brassicas, such as Cavolo Nero kale and large-headed cabbages. These are likely to blow around in the wind and flop over unless staked, which can damage their delicate roots as well as making it harder to weed beneath them.
- **Sow** large areas of hardy Oriental salad leaves now for harvesting through winter. Seed mixes usually contain rocket, mustard, Pak choi, mizuna and Chinese cabbage. These will germinate within days but be sure to sow plenty as with few growing days left this season, you need time to grow enough leaves to see you through winter. Either scatter and rake seed into the patch or, if your ground is very weedy, sow them in rows to make weeding easier.
- **Start** picking autumn brassicas such as broccoli, cabbages, cauliflower, and kale now. Cut cabbages and cauliflowers through the stem at ground level. Lift out the roots and compost them now or leave the short stump to re-sprout more leaves to crop in a few weeks time. Cut off the heads of Calabrese broccoli and work down the plant, taking the smaller side shoots. Do the same with sprouting broccoli, leaving it in the ground to produce a few more side shoots into autumn.
- **Harvest** your squash and pumpkins now to ripen them somewhere dry and warm. This will harden the skin and lengthen their storing time. In hot, dry conditions this can be done outside but don't let them get damp. If you're hoping to win the biggest pumpkin competition, keep them growing but raise them off the ground to stop them rotting.
- **Keep** successional sowing spinach for harvesting next spring.
- **Lift** witloof chicory for forcing. Plant in a container under cover and keep in the dark.
- **Plant** seedlings of spring cabbages like 'Winter Jewel' and 'Duncan' into the ground now. These are hardy and will withstand cold to produce nutritious leaves for harvesting in February.
- **Keep** your herbs going with a few key tasks that will give you a steady supply of fresh leaves through the year. Instead of spending money, let a few annuals go to seed, then store the seeds to sow in spring. Keep shrubby herbs trimmed to encourage plenty of fresh foliage and continue to crop leafy herbs, adding them to lettuce and rocket to spice up autumn salads. **1.** Pull dried coriander seeds off old flowerheads with your hand. The seeds will come off easily and can be stored in a paper envelope for sowing next year. **2.** Plant up a pot of shrubby herbs for a supply of winter leaves. Rosemary, sage and thyme all do well together, needing little water but plenty of light. **3.** Lift, split and replant clumps of herbs to rejuvenate them for next year, Mint, lemon balm and French tarragon can all be split before they go dormant, but keep the tarragon in a pot or sheltered spot as it is less hardy. **4.** Sow a few annual herbs like dill and coriander for the last crop this season. Do them in pots if you have room under cover to keep them going longer.
- **Split** and pot up some chives, cut back old shoots and grow indoors.
- **Main** crop potatoes should be ready to dig up before slugs get to them. Leave them to dry for a few hours before putting them in boxes or sacks. Any that are damaged should be used straight away as they will quickly rot in storage.
- **If** frost is forecast, harvest tender vegetables such as peppers, courgettes, and tomatoes.
- **Pick** sweet corn this month. Push your fingernail into a kernel - they are ready if they release milky sap. If the sap is still watery, wait a week or two for the cobs to ripen.
- **Allow** sun to reach ripening tomatoes by removing nearby leaves.
- **Plant** early potatoes now for a special addition to your Christmas feast. You'll need seed potatoes from a supplier that has had them cold stored for the summer. It's also possible to store seed potatoes from spring in the fridge yourself. They are best grown in bags or pots to be moved under cover when it gets frosty. Plant into rich, soil-based compost. Keep well-watered and harvest on the day you eat them.
- **Swiss** chard is pretty much an all-year-round crop, and you can still sow some now for future cropping. Cut-and-come-again pickings are best, where you pick one or two outer leaves at a time from each plant for the kitchen leaving the plant to grow more leaves for a longer time.

TREES/SHRUBS/BULBS/FLOWERS

- **Plant** Dryopteris ferns in dry, shady places.
- **Look** out for roses that have nice hips and avoid deadheading these.

- **Lightly** prune weeping standard roses, removing all spent flowers, and check their supports are sound.
- **It** can be easy to forget when planting young lavenders that they are bushes. Also known as subshrubs, they have woody bases and herbaceous top growth. If left unpruned, lavender plants quickly become bare based and leggy, with diminishing flowers and sparse foliage. So always trim lavender in September, after flowering and before the risk of frost Cut back to just within the leaf growth above the woody stems, and never below, as they don't resprout well from the old wood.
- **Prune** summer-flowering jasmine once it has finished blooming.
- **Move** small shrubs and trees if they need repositioning.
- **Plant** bulbs beneath trees after loosening the soil and working in some organic fertiliser.
- **Plant** early bulbs of Iris this month in pots for an intense display of flowers in February. Plant them three times their depth in gritty compost and once it gets colder and damper place them in a cold frame, to keep them cool but dry.
- **If** you want to overwinter your pelargoniums you should look to bring them indoors by mid to late September. They can be put into the greenhouse. Watering is reduced to a minimum so that by November it is once a month at the most and in the cool but frost-free greenhouse they almost go dormant and have a rest.
- **Feed** oriental hellebores to encourage a good show of flowers early in the year, feed them now with calcified seaweed or Growmore and then mulch around them with spent mushroom compost or garden compost.
- **Summer-flowering** jasmine is pruned by cutting back to a strong new side shoot below the flowered stems. Completely remove any weak or congested stems to encourage new growth.

FRUIT

- **Order** bare-root fruit trees and bushes to plant out between November and March. Or buy container grown trees or bushes that can be planted out at any time.
- **Prune** summer raspberries, blackberries, and hybrid berries when they have finished cropping, removing all fruited stems at the base. The remaining canes grew this year and will produce next year's fruit. Tie them onto the support frame.
- **Harvest** apples and pears and store them in a cool, dark place in plastic bags with small holes in them.
- **Pick** blackberries, hybrid berries and autumn raspberries.
- **Tree** fruit, such as apples, that's been pecked by birds is particularly vulnerable - it turns the fruit brown, often with concentric rings of grey pustules. It's vital to remove affected fruit, as the problem can spread to other fruit

GREENHOUSES/COLD FRAMES

- **As** it gets colder and the nights draw in, pests like the vine weevil look for corners to shelter and hibernate in. Controlling them now with biocontrol's, traps and organic contact sprays will reduce next year's population.
- **Insulate** with bubble wrap to guard against cold winds and frost.
- **Take** advantage of warm, dry days to tidy and clean the greenhouse. It's much easier to do this job when you can leave plants and equipment outdoors for a few hours. Wear a mask if it is dusty.
- **Plant** spring bulbs in pots. Keeping them under cover over winter means they'll flower early.
- **Prepare** border soil for winter salad growing as your summer crops stop producing fruits.
- **Shorter** days and lower natural light conditions make plant growth challenging, so pull up blinds and take down shade netting. White shade paint can be left till it's time to clean the greenhouse. Keep the vents open on warmer days to maintain cooler inside temperatures but close them at night when the temperature plummets. The last of the tomatoes, aubergines, melons, and peppers will ripen better with more light. The combination of light and ventilation will help stop autumn rots but check regularly for fungal disease and remove infected leaves.
- **As** tomatoes rate of growth slows, reduce watering, and stop feeding. This makes the flavour sweet and more intense. It also stops the fruit from splitting, a common problem at the end of the season. Remove most of the leaves, too, so that the last trusses get maximum light for ripening. If you need to clear the greenhouse, cut off each truss and hang them up somewhere cool and airy to continue ripening. Blight is common now, so discard any fruit with brown blotches.

- **Plan** a strategy for bringing tender plants indoors for the winter. Having access to a greenhouse means you can keep far more plants alive. Work out how much space you'll need and clean out that part of the greenhouse so it's free from problems that might infect your garden plants.

HOUSE PLANTS

- **Water** your house plants less and stop feeding plants in autumn.
- **As** light levels decrease it's a good idea to keep foliage clean.
- **Make** trimming and tidying up plants part of the autumn activity in preparation for winter.