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## october in the garden

Posted in *All Gardening Advice, For Beginners, Annuals, Bulbs, Indoor, Perennials, Perennials and Biennials, Shrubs and Climbers, Vegetables and Fruit, October on 1st October 2019*

Autumn is officially here, in all its golden glory. The ground is wet with dew in the mornings and the garden is covered in cobwebs, but some days may still be glorious and warm. This may be the first month some areas of the country experience their first frosts. The leaves are falling from the trees in abundance and a lot of summer crops are coming to an end.

Preparation for winter is in full swing – fruit and autumn veg are ready to be brought in and stored, and plants should be cut back, wrapped up or brought inside to help them survive the chilly winter temperatures.

- [The Cutting Garden](#)
- [Perennials, Shrubs and Trees](#)
- [The Kitchen Garden](#)
- [Other Jobs](#)

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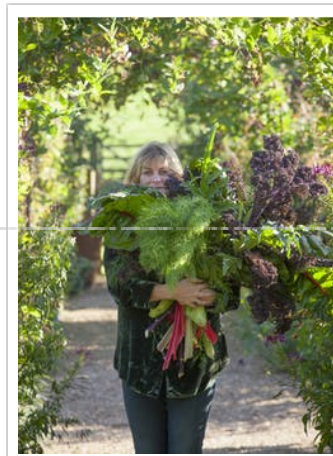
### THE CUTTING GARDEN

#### Sowing and Growing

- Collect seeds from summer-flowering plants for planting next year. Or with beautiful seed heads such as alliums, cut off from the plant whole, dry and spray paint in silvers or golds for glorious Christmas decorations. It's also a good idea to leave some seeds in situ in the garden for hungry birds.
- Plant out the hardy annuals you've been bringing on inside and any biennials still not placed.
- Sow your [sweet pea seeds](#) now, to ensure larger, more robust and earlier flowering plants next spring.
- Save seed from your favourite plants – it is easy to do and will provide you with plenty of plants to fill gaps or make an existing scheme have more impact. Leave a few seedheads on your plants after they've finished flowering to allow the seeds to ripen, then collect them and store in paper bags in a cool dry place until you are ready to sow them.
- Dig up any scented-leaf pelargoniums still outside and pot them up as winter houseplants. Most will remain happily on a sunny window ledge for much of the winter, to be cut back early next spring.

#### Bulbs and Tubers

- You can continue to plant spring bulbs in the still-warm ground, to give them the longest possible growing time ahead of next year. [Narcissi](#) can be planted in pots (try the wonderfully delicate, primrose-yellow N. 'Hawera'), or in borders underplanting dahlias etc (N. 'Silver Chimes' is particularly good for this) or in lawns (N. 'Avalanche' is a good choice here – a hugely prolific flowerer, with the first blooms appearing from early March).
- [Alliums](#) are also happiest planted while the soil is still a little warm in early-mid Autumn, in contrast to tulips, which benefit from going in to the ground when the temperature has dropped (when the diseases and fungus that they are prone to during the warmer months have died off).
- Plant peonies this month as well, and established peony plants should be pruned shortly after the first



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frost.

- Brighten up shady bits of your garden with spring-flowering, shade-tolerant bulbs. Go for [snowdrops](#) for January and February, followed by Anemone blanda 'White Splendour' and narcissi (such as the native N. pseudonarcissus) for March and April, finishing with [bluebells](#) in April and May.
- If we have early frosts, remove dahlia and gladiolus bulbs and tubers from the ground, cutting back their stems to approx 5cm from the roots first. Leave the bulbs somewhere warm and dry for a couple of days. Sprinkling with yellow sulphur powder is an idea, particularly on any damaged tubers. Then store in dry compost in a box lined with newspaper, or in a pot, somewhere warm and dry, until spring. Alternatively, mulch your dahlias in late autumn under several inches of mushroom compost or similar and just clear this away once the worst of the frosts are over in the spring.
- Lift and divide large clumps of crocosmia, and replant into freshly prepared soil. If you have any spring bulbs in storage that you lifted earlier in the year, now's the time to check them over before replanting. Dispose of any that are showing obvious signs of rot, or that feel soft to the touch.
- This is a good moment to create your winter ornamental tubs, too. Plant a tall and stately [tulip](#) such as the scented 'Ballerina', with an equally fragrant 'Brown Sugar' or 'Orange Favourite' to push their way up through the deep red wallflower 'Fire King'.
- Pot up roots of [lily of the valley](#) to provide fragrant winter flowers. Any spent compost from containers of summer bedding can be spread around the borders to use as a mulch.
- Plant new [amaryllis](#) to give you beautiful flowers for winter and early spring. Plant them firmly, cramming the soil around the bulb. Amaryllis like their soil rich, but exceptionally well drained.
- Plant [forced bulbs for Christmas](#).
- Plant some mini iris ( [Iris reticulata](#) and [Iris histrioides](#)) for pots inside, cramming them into pots with the bulbs almost touching. Planted now, they will be in flower in February when forced on a sunny windowsill.
- Most gladioli should be planted in the spring, but there are some lovely varieties – such as [Gladiolus communis subsp. byzantinus](#) and 'The Bride' – that can be put in the ground now for flowering in May and June.

## Harvesting

Lovely things to pick and arrange from your garden in October:

- Hardy annuals: late-flowering varieties, Euphorbia oblongata, sunflowers and scabious
- Half-hardy annuals: long-flowering varieties, eg. cosmos, cleome, nicotiana and moluccella, and some from second sowing, eg. amaranthus, antirrhinums, tithonias and zinnias
- Tender perennials: chrysanthemums and dahlias
- Perennials: rudbeckias and nerines
- Shrubs and trees: hydrangeas, spindle (Euonymus alatus) and autumn leaves

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## PERENNIALS, SHRUBS AND TREES

### Pruning and Tidying

- Continue deadheading.
- Keep weeding. Perennial weeds may pull out easily now, but make sure that you don't leave any of the root to overwinter!
- Bring tender plants, eg. pelargoniums, in out of the frost and begin to cut them back.
- Divide and replant overcrowded spring and summer flowering perennials, such as geraniums.
- Lift, divide and replant congested clumps of perennials. Use two garden forks back to back to split larger clumps.
- Remove plant supports and store away.
- Prune climbing roses and rambling roses once they've finished flowering and tie in the stems before autumn winds cause damage. Cut back any dead, diseased or damaged branches to the ground or a healthy bud. Cut side shoots back by about two-thirds to a outward facing bud, and tie in horizontally to encourage flowering shoots. Collect fallen leaves from under rose bushes so they don't carry diseases over to next year.
- Prune tall summer flowering shrubs such as Buddleia to about half their height in order to prevent damage by winter winds and to tidy their appearance. Remove suckers growing around the base of trees.

### Planting

- Plant evergreen **shrubs** and new **climbers**.
- Prepare the ground for any bare-rooted stock coming next month.

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## THE KITCHEN GARDEN

### Veg

- Peas and beans that have gone over can be cut down to ground level, and their roots left in the soil to be dug over – they then break down and return vital nitrogen to the earth. You can also sow broad beans this month for good early pickings in May and June next year.
- Plant shallots, **onion sets and garlic** now for the best sized bulbs next year.
- Cut back Jerusalem artichokes and asparagus to ground level. After cutting the asparagus ferns, carefully weed the bed and cover with a layer of mulch or manure. You can then mulch with grit over the top and scatter a handful of granular dishwasher salt, which acts as a weedkiller. The saline environment kills annual weed seedlings, whereas asparagus – as a seashore plant – is fine.
- Cut down the dying tops of other perennial vegetables .
- Dig over veg beds as their contents go over. Cold weather can often help to break down any large clods of soil in to smaller, more free draining particles, ready for the next sowing.
- Cover any productive salad plants with cloches to protect from the frosts.
- Earth up leeks to cover and blanch their stems.
- Early-maturing varieties of peas can be sown outside now – cover emerging seedlings with cloches to protect from birds.
- Make sure Brussels sprouts are firm in the ground as wind-rock breaks the tiny hairs on the roots that take in the nutrients. Earthing up a few inches around the stems and treading in or staking will keep them secure. If you haven't already done so, net your brassicas as they will be under attack as other food becomes scarce.
- Florence fennel is one of the best autumn and winter crops, but will get damaged in a hard frost, so fleece or cloche it now to harvest straight from the garden. Mound up a little around the base of the bulb before covering to increase the size of the swollen part and help prevent bolting.
- Remove yellowing leaves from Brussels Sprouts plants and other brassicas to prevent the spread of disease and dispose of them.
- A warm autumnal day is the perfect time to add manure to your potato patch. On thin soils – chalk and sand – double dig, adding manure to the base of a trench before turning the soil of the next trench over that manure. On improved heavy clay soil, spread the manure and tease it in with a fork.

### Salad and herbs

- Cover any productive salad plants with cloches to protect from the frosts doorstep or windowsill.
- Sow **winter herbs and salad** in containers. Get a decent sized (at least 8in (20cm) deep) wooden or polystyrene box/crate. Knock several drainage holes in the bottom, fill with compost and sow your salad. Cover the boxes with cling film to enclose the moisture and put them somewhere warm to germinate.
- Hardy herbs can be planted out in guttering in a south-facing spot.
- Pot up less hardy herbs such as parsley, chives and French tarragon and bring inside into a sunny, frost-free spot.
- Cut back stems of oregano and marjoram that have flowered, to just above ground level.
- Cover tender herbs with a cloche and pot up some, eg mint, chives and parsley, to keep on a bright window sill.

### Fruit

- Plant new soft fruit canes.
- As soon as you've finished picking this year's blackberries, the old fruited canes can be pruned out to make space for next year's to develop. Cut back all the stems that have produced blackberries this year to ground level and tie in new growth. Leave autumn fruiting raspberries until later in the winter.
- Move citrus trees indoors to a frost-free position away from radiators or draughts.
- Plant a fruit tree – an apple or pear. Dig a hole twice the size of the rootball and break up the base, adding plenty of organic matter (leaf mould or manure). Plant the tree to the same level as it was previously. As with roses, this ensures the graft is below soil level. If you have no more space for a fruit tree in the ground, plant one in a pot. Use a 37-litre filled with John Innes No 3, mixed with about a third of tree or

shrub compost and some Osmocote (or other slow-release fertiliser), with plenty of crocks in the bottom.

## Harvesting

Here's what you could be picking and eating this time next year or, if you're an old hand, already are:

- Brassicas: kale
- Roots: carrots, Maincrop potatoes, stored onions, beetroot and celeriac
- Salad: rocket, salad leaves, chard, spinach, last hearting-lettuces and Florence fennel
- Edible Flowers: nasturtiums, runner bean flowers and first of violas
- Legumes: last July-sown French beans
- Squash: all pumpkins and squash
- Fruity veg: aubergines, peppers, last cucumbers and tomatoes
- Herbs: parsley, chervil, coriander, dill, last of the mint, rosemary, sage and thyme
- Fruit: cobnuts and walnuts, apples, quince and pears.

Hang up stems of lemon verbena to dry before they shed their leaves. Cut good bunches, tie them together and put them somewhere well ventilated but warm.

Harvest apples – windfalls can be collected up and used in cooking. But if you are looking to juice the fruit, try to avoid windfalls and pick the fruit from the tree as it ripens. To see whether the apples are ripe, gently twist half a turn – if they are ready they'll come away with a satisfying snap. If not, leave for a little longer. Ripe fruit is essential for juice (and cider of course!) because the all important sugars are at their best at this point. The process of juicing in a fruit and vegetable press is also a lot easier when the fruit is ripe.

Discover Sarah's favourite [recipes for October](#), including her favourite [red pepper and onion relish](#), [shallot tatin with leftover cheese](#) and [green Thai autumn vegetable curry](#).

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## OTHER JOBS

- Continue to clear leaves from lawns to avoid brown patches; collect up the leaves in leaf mould bags or pile them onto the compost to create lovely mulch for next year's borders. Rake them up, then mow over to chop, then gather them up – this will make their conversion to leaf mould much quicker.
- Check that newly planted container grown trees/shrubs/roses are firmed in, strong winds can rock them and loosen the roots forming a gap at the base which will collect rain water, freeze and damage the roots.
- Aerate and feed lawns to help them recover from heavy summer use, and prepare for the coming cold months.
- Start to wrap containers that need protection with fleece, or hessian. Alternatively, bring the whole thing inside before the risk of a hard frost. Citrus, tender agapanthus, dahlias and pelargoniums all need to come inside to somewhere frost free. They don't need light in this dormant phase, so under a bench in a potting shed or greenhouse is ideal.
- Pile bark mulch over the crowns of hardy fuchsias to provide winter protection.
- After a good summer, the soil is warmer than usual. It's moist too, so now is a good time to mulch wherever there's bare soil. Spread home-made compost, leaf mould or green waste from your local council a good inch and a half deep. It helps to condition soil, retain moisture and suppress weeds.
- Raise the cutting height when mowing the lawn and apply an autumn food. Use a fork or hollow-tined aerator to spike your lawn and improve drainage. Continue to collect fallen leaves. New turf can still be laid.
- On a dry day, mow the grass quite tightly, particularly where you have bulbs. They will then show clearly through the grass next spring. Crocus and snowdrops on the lawn edge are a huge addition, and you'll see them so much more clearly if the grass is well cut.
- Turn the compost heap.
- Sow green manure crops over bare areas of soil.
- Insulate your cold frame with polystyrene sheeting for extra protection.

## In the greenhouse

- Remove shading and insulate your greenhouse so that everything is kept frost-free inside. Stick bubble wrap to the inside of the glass, or try a thermal screen. Most commercial greenhouses have these – they are made from what looks like silver paper which deflects the worst of the sun in the summer and frost in the winter. They shut – or open – on a thermostat or at the touch of a button. They're a brilliant invention that saves a lot of time.

- Start to reduce watering of plants in the greenhouse, and make sure windows are only opened on warm sunny days and always closed up every night.
- Reduce watering in the greenhouse.

### Wildlife and pests

- Winter moths can devastate next year's crop of apples and pears. The eggs hatch into caterpillars that can decimate leaves and blossom in spring, so act now to avoid them. Wrap grease-bands around the bases of all your fruit trees. The wingless females will soon emerge from the soil and as they attempt to crawl up the trees they will be trapped in the bands.
- Remove fallen leaves and dead foliage from borders and pots to prevent pests overwintering amongst it. Most pests are on the decline with the onset of colder weather, but botrytis and mildew may still be a problem if the weather is moist. Remove any affected material and make a note of affected plants to take preventative steps next spring.
- Check bonfire piles for hibernating hedgehogs or toads. Do not discourage them – they are great at disposing of pests!
- Top up bird feeders and put out food on the ground and bird tables. All feeds, including peanuts, are safe, as the breeding season is now over.
- Let seedheads form on last of the flowers to attract finches.

### useful kit...



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