

OCTOBER

Autumn now is underway – leaves are falling (and can be collected to make leaf mould, also known as black gold!); foliage is starting to wilt and blacken; but autumn colours are to be enjoyed. Now is the time to take apart all the summer displays and prepare for the winter to come. But be selective – leave plants standing that are architectural, or have seeds/berries for the birds to eat in leaner times, or provide homes for insects to overwinter, or are just beautiful covered in frost. No need to put everything ‘to bed’ – much can be done in the early spring and wildlife, in particular, will thank you.

SOW winter vegetables before it's too late – kales, spring greens, pak choi, sprouting broccoli and winter leaves and lettuces.

PLANT

- garlic by breaking the bulb into individual cloves and pushing them into a prepared bed so the tip is just covered. You will need to hoe between them remove weeds so make sure the space between them in the row is wide enough for your hoe (normally around 15cms apart). You can plant them in the greenhouse – this seems to protect them from rust which has become a problem, the cloves growing much smaller
- carrots can also be sown outside in early October so long as they are protected, for example with a cloche
- spring pots if you haven't done so earlier with things such as bulbs, wallflowers and pansies. You'll have to wait until they start to grow strongly, but they will – keep in a porch or similar – but cover with wire netting or similar if you have squirrels since they love to eat unsprouted bulbs!

HARVEST the last of the summer vegetables and the first of those that you planted earlier in the summer, such as cauliflower and broccoli

GARDEN MAINTENANCE

- Bring in tender plants that need protection.
- Buy and plant indoor flowers and bulbs to flower at Christmas – make sure bulbs have been specially treated for early growth.
- Keep clearing up – weeds, finished plants in the garden or in the greenhouse.
- Tidy up perennials, keeping food and shelter for wildlife where you can.
- Turn the compost heap.
- Finish collecting seeds from your garden to sow next year.
- Divide established rhubarb plants to make new ones for next year.

JUNIORS' JOBS FOR OCTOBER

There are lots of **seeds you can sow this month**, even though winter is approaching:

- Some salad seeds, such as mustard leaves, winter salad mixes and winter lettuce can simply be scattered on the surface of compost in a seed tray or pot, lightly covered with soil and placed in a flat container of water to let the compost absorb as much as it needs to make the seeds start to grow. Keep them on a window ledge, a greenhouse or a cold frame, be sure to keep them lightly watered when they start to become too dry and, with patience, hey presto - fresh salad leaves for you to pick and enjoy!
- Now is a good time to plant peas – they will carry on growing over the winter and start to produce food for you to eat early in the spring. Peas such as Meteor grow to just 45cm, so they're great in pots – sow them about 2.5cm deep in peat-free compost, water them and put them outside. If it gets very cold over the winter, either bring them under cover if you can, such as in a shed or greenhouse, or cover them in fleece to stop them getting frostbite!
- Some flower seeds can also be sown now, and will flower in the spring – marigolds and love-in-a-mist for example. Sow them as you did the salad leaf seeds, but when they are big enough to handle, you can prick them out into small pots of peat-free compost and let them carry on growing.

This month, you can also **collect seeds** from garden flowers that have been in flower in the summer – the seedheads themselves or the pods that are on stalks. Pick the seedheads or stalks and put them to dry, for example on a warm window ledge. When they're fully dry, the pods will open – you can then shake out the seeds or lightly crush the outer shells onto a sheet of white paper so you can see the tiny seeds. Make sure you throw away the outer shells since they may contain moulds or pests and diseases. Get an envelope or paper bag and label the packet – the name of the seed and the date it was collected. Now keep them dry and cool until you sow them next spring – don't let them get too warm because they will rot!