

Autumn Jobs in the Fruit & Vegetable Garden

This primarily covers the period from the beginning of September to the end of November.

Harvesting of summer crops will still be in full swing initially, starting to slow down just after the middle of September. Crops such as runner beans and french beans will often continue to provide a few meals until around mid-October, and salads can continue to be harvested from later summer sowing. Keep an eye on the weather forecast for any sign of frost that will kill off tender crops. In Sunningdale it is often around mid-October that the first real frost occurs. So, try to harvest any remaining tender crops in good time. For example, any unripe outdoor tomatoes should be brought indoors to ripen. Winter squashes – such as butternuts – and pumpkins should be harvested around mid to late October.

Dig up & store carrots and potatoes by the end of November. In a mild winter it is possible to leave them in the ground and dig them as required but a cold or wet winter will probably lead to rot.

Harvesting autumn and winter crops such as leeks, kale, sprouts *et cetera* can usually commence from mid-October onwards, particularly where early varieties have been grown.

Clearing sections of the plot can usually commence from October onwards, particularly those areas where you wish to sow / plant during the autumn season.

Autumn sowing and planting. For selected crops this usually takes place in the period from mid-October to late November. You do not have to sow / plant at this time – you can always wait until spring. However, you can often get sturdier and earlier crops next year this way. The downside is that you may suffer some losses during any extreme weather. Typical items include: broad beans (use an autumn-sowing variety such as Aquadulce); garlic; onion sets (Japanese onions and specific autumn planting varieties) and shallots.

Cleaning plant pots, seed trays *et cetera* can commence any time that is convenient from October through to the end of winter. Use a solution that contains some disinfectant, e.g. Jeyes Fluid or Armillatox.

Browse seed catalogues. October is usually the time when the catalogues for next season pop through the door and the darker nights encourage the grower to start thinking about what to grow next year.

Order fruit plants for winter planting. It is best to order early – ideally for delivery from late autumn – to guarantee getting the varieties that you want. The stocks in local garden centres frequently tend to be low with a limited choice over the late autumn and winter period.

Crop Rotation is essential to avoid any build-up of disease or lack of specific nutrients in the soil. Autumn is often a good time to think about the layout of your plot for next year.

Finally, November is often an ideal month for carrying out any **general plot maintenance**, as there are minimal cultivation tasks to be carried out and the winter weather has not yet arrived. Jobs such as pruning any surrounding hedges or shrubs, tackling any jobs related to structures like sheds, fruit cages, cold frames, cloches *et cetera*, and improving paths or constructing raised beds.