

SEPTEMBER

While we should take time to enjoy the last flowers of summer bedding, the start of autumn provides the best time to prepare the lawn and garden for winter and plant up bulbs for spring displays. Your home grown fruit and vegetables should be in full harvest.

THE ORNAMENTAL GARDEN

Autumn is nature's time for planting shrubs, trees, hedges and hardy perennials. Buy and plant all new hardy material while soils are still warm and rains keep the soil adequately moist to encourage new root growth. Most soils need some improvement if they are to encourage strong root growth from these newcomers, especially if they are going to thrive for many years to come. If you are blessed with heavy clay then you will need to encourage better drainage and if you are gardening on sandy, stony or chalk soils then you will need to increase the organic matter content so that the new roots can draw on moisture and nutrients not easily held in the unimproved soil.

Planting is more than just digging a hole. On clay you need to dig in some sharp grit and some Miracle-Gro Soil Improver both to the bottom of the hole and to the soil used to fill around the root ball. On light soils you can forget the sharp grit, but just include plenty of soil improver or your own home-made garden compost. As you will need to water these plants, especially shrubs, trees and hedges throughout next year the addition of Miracle-Gro Slow Release Plant Food into the top few centimetres of soil will ensure they also get fed automatically whenever the soil temperature is high enough to encourage growth. If your garden is currently short of flower colour then think about planting late summer blooms such as Sedum, Rudbeckia, Michaelmas daisies (*Aster Novibelgii*) and cone flowers (*Echinacea*).

Michaelmas daisies are notorious for developing white powdery mildew on the buds and foliage, although this is easily controlled if you spray at the first signs of disease with a systemic fungicide such as FungusClear Ultra or FungusClear 2 Gun!

Roses, on the other hand, are more likely to show signs of blackspot disease. These chocolate colour blotches are the obvious symptom of disease although you will also notice that affected leaves will tend to fall off the bushes much earlier than clean plants. You are too late to do much about the existing disease, apart from restrict it spreading, but spraying with RoseClear 3 or RoseClear 3 Gun! will help. The secret of clean roses is to start spraying with the same product or a systemic fungicide early in spring when the first leaves are emerging. In this way you prevent the spores from getting inside the leaves and make subsequent sprays through the summer much more effective. Clear away any bedding plants that have finished flowering and place on the compost heap. Dig up the bedding without trying to dig up the weeds, especially

if they are perennial ones such as bindweed, ground elder or nettles that have extensive root systems. If you leave the weeds clean and intact you can simply spray the weed leaves with Fast Action Roundup Ready to Use or Tumbleweed Ready to Use to kill them - roots and all. Trail the bindweed over the bare earth and then spray on a calm day when the very fine droplets will not present a big problem to other plants. Pick a dry day when no rain is expected, for the weedkillers need up to 6 hours on the leaf or you will have to re-apply.

In most gardens you will need space to plant out winter pansies, daisies (bellis), wallflowers, tulips, daffodils, snakehead fritillaries and other bulbs to provide your spring highlights. If you give these plants a feed of Miracle-Gro Plant Food immediately after planting and again a couple of weeks later it will help them produce a good root system and encourage good flowering during mild spells. A sprinkling of SlugClear Advanced Pellets will protect these plants from the attention of slugs and snails.

When the flower borders have been tidied up and fully planted, add a mulch of Levington Decorative Chipped Forest Bark to the soil surface. This attractive and protective organic layer will hold in moisture, protect roots from severe frosts and reduce the amount of weed seed germination.

TOPICAL TIP

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THE LAWN

Deciduous trees and shrubs will soon be turning colour bringing a russet end to their foliage. Unfortunately after they have fallen, these dead leaves will encourage bare patches and worm casts if left on the lawn for any length of time. That's why the most important job during autumn is to rake up fallen leaves at least once a week.

Mowing occasionally will also be necessary, depending on temperatures and grass growth. By the end of the month you and your lawn will have noticed that cold nights herald the change to autumn; so it's time to prepare your lawn for winter.

One application of a special autumn fertilizer such as EverGreen Autumn will kill any existing moss and gradually feed grass so that the lawn is thicker and hardier for next year. If you have no spreader then the 100m² size of EverGreen Autumn comes complete with a handy dispenser which makes even application as easy as walking. Those people with a larger lawn may find it easier to buy large bags of EverGreen Autumn and to apply through the dedicated Evergreen Easy Spreader. Those people who already own a top-of-the-range Scotts

Evergreen drop spreader should stick with Scotts Lawn Builder Autumn Lawn Food.

None of them will cost a fortune. You can feed the average sized lawn of 80 sq. metres for less than £10 and with these spreader devices it will only take you 10 minutes to apply. Your investment in preparing your lawn for winter will be rewarded with a much better lawn next spring.

The end of September is the ideal time of year to sow new lawns and if you followed the tips from my August diary your soil will be ready for sowing. Simply kill off any weed growth on your prepared area with a contact weedkiller such as Weedol or Weedol MAX and a couple of days later rake the surface. Scatter EverGreen Lawn Seed over the area evenly and rake again to ensure a good contact between seed and soil.

TOPICAL TIP

Re-seed bare patches in the lawn with Evergreen Lawn Repair Kit. Dig the soil surface to relieve compaction and rake the plant food into the surface. Sprinkle the seed evenly over the surface and again rake in. Water regularly until the new grass is established. A covering of fleece for a few days will encourage germination and protect the area from birds and cats.

THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

Gather French and runner beans regularly and freeze any excess. Watch out for late infestations of blackfly and spray as soon as the first signs are seen on the newer shoots. Use an insecticide that does not restrict harvesting of food crops such as BugClear Gun! for Fruit & Veg or BugClear for Fruit & Veg.

Sweetcorn plants should be producing succulent cobs which will benefit from weekly feeds with Miracle-Gro Plant Food to encourage swelling. Test for ripeness when the silks turn a chocolate brown colour. When squeezed, the kernels produce a clear liquid before ripeness and a milky liquid when ready. For maximum flavour, eat or freeze as soon as harvested.

Carefully lift ripe onions on a warm, dry day. Remove any soil and place on a raised piece of chicken wire to ensure a good airflow around the onions and allow to fully ripen in a shed or garage for a week or so. When fully ripened make into traditional strings for long term display and use.

As the ground is cleared of crops in the vegetable plot, check the area for weeds, especially those with creeping roots such as couch grass (twitch), ground elder and bindweed. If you find these perennial weeds then treat the whole area with a systemic weedkiller such as Roundup GC or Tumbleweed before you start digging. Leave the weeds a couple of weeks to absorb the glyphosate right down to the tips of the roots and after this time dig over the area leaving a rough surface for winter frosts to break down.

TOPICAL TIP

For a winter crop of carrots, sow seed under cloches using a quick maturing variety such as Amsterdam Forcing or Early Nantes.

THE FRUIT GARDEN

Harvest blackberries, loganberries and autumn fruiting raspberries as the fruit ripens. A few feeds of an ericaceous plant food such as Miracle-Gro Rhododendron, Azalea and Camellia Plant Food will provide essential nutrients to encourage a strong crop and the necessary chelated iron to help prevent leaves from turning pale and yellow.

Some apple varieties will be ready for harvest in September. Wait until the colour develops on the fruit and start to pick the ripest when the apple comes away from the tree easily. Test this by lifting the apple in the palm of the hand giving it a gentle twist. If it comes away with stalk attached then it is ready. Pick the tree over a few weeks as the fruit ripens. First to be ready will be the fruit on the top of the tree followed by lower, outside fruit and finally apples on the inside. Store only the sound, blemish-free fruit on trays, wrapping each in paper or special oiled wrapping.

TOPICAL TIP

Maincrop raspberries should have their new stems tied onto supporting wires as they develop to maintain a tidy appearance and prevent wind battering during winter.

PATIO GARDENING

Tomatoes, aubergines and peppers that are growing in giant planters will need regular feeding with Tomorite to encourage ripening. Green tomato chutney is only OK if that's all you can manage, but feeding will help to ripen the fruits and give maximum flavour.

If you are up for a challenge then it's worth trying to take cuttings of tender bedding plants such as heliotrope, pelargoniums, verbenas and fuchsias to save overwinter on a windowsill or in a heated porch or conservatory. Take cuttings as early in September as possible. Cut cleanly below a leaf joint and remove the bottom leaves so that there is 5cm (2 inches) of clean stem to be pushed into the compost. Push four or five cuttings around the edge of a 10cm pot that is almost full of Levington Seed & Cutting or Levington Multi-Purpose Compost. Fuchsias appreciate a closed in atmosphere created by a clear polythene bag, but the hairy leaves of verbena, pelargoniums and heliotrope strike better without this addition.

When your potted displays of summer plants are finished, it's time to repot with autumn colour and spring bulbs. To avoid the carry over of pests such as vine weevil and diseases such as root rot, it's worth investing in fresh compost such

as Miracle-Gro All Purpose Growing Compost or Levington Multi-Purpose Compost.

At the bottom of each pot place a layer of stones or broken shards of terracotta pots to ensure easy drainage of your compost. Gradually fill up your pots with spring bulbs in multi-layers to give you a succession of colour. Plant daffodils deepest, followed by hyacinths and crocus. Top off every container with winter flowering bedding. Look out for daisies (Bellis) and winter pansies in all their various colours. You can buy pansies in single orange, blue and lemon colours or the highly decorative 'faces' of purple, cream and blue. When finished stand the pots on terracotta 'feet' to ensure drainage remains unimpeded and the pot is lifted above the terrace paving that can be frozen solid.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL. USE PESTICIDES SAFELY

BugClear™ Gun! for Fruit & Veg contains pyrethrins. BugClear™ for Fruit & Veg contains rape seed oil. BugClear Ultra Gun!™ contains acetamiprid. Evergreen Autumn and Scotts Lawn Builder Autumn Lawn Food contain ferrous sulphate. Roundup GC, Fast Action Roundup Ready to Use, Tumbleweed® and Tumbleweed® Ready to Use contain glyphosate. FungusClear™ Ultra contains triticonazole. FungusClear 2 Gun!™ contains myclobutanil. RoseClear 3 and RoseClear 3 Gun! contain bifenthrin and myclobutanil. SlugClear Advanced Pellets contains metaldehyde. Weedol® contains diquat. Weedol MAX contains pelargonic acid.

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