



Top Tips

September Gardening Jobs

End of Summer

This is the time of year that our gardens start looking like a tangled jungle when the lush growth of the summer collapses and the colourful flowers turn to brown seed heads. Roses, shrubs and climbers have usually sent up lots of new shoots and they are taking over our borders. Now is the time to slow down on the weeding and watering and tackle some different gardening tasks.

Seed collection

This is the exciting job! Leave some seed heads intact and let them grow to maturity – turning brown and dry. Just before they start to open and shed their seeds naturally you need to pick a dry day and cut the seed heads with a stem attached. Tie the stalks together and hang them upside down in a cool, dry place with a large paper (not plastic*) bag over the seed heads. Leave them in place for a week and then check to see if the seeds have come out of the seed pods/heads – give them a careful shake to encourage them. If they fall out naturally remove the stalks from the bag.

The next part is fiddly so find a plenty of space at a table with good light and spread out a large sheet of white paper. Then tip out your bag of seeds and sift through the plant material to remove any dried up pieces of pods, stalks and leaves to leave just the seeds. Then you need to tip the seeds into a small paper bag or envelop and label them with the plant name and date. Keep these seeds stored in a dry cool place until you sow them.

** plastic bags will retain moisture and cause seeds to rot*

Bulb Planting

Garden centres and mail order suppliers now have the full range of spring bulbs available for planting and once you've tidied up your borders and containers you should have some space for new bulbs. Two key things to remember when planting bulbs are

Depth – plant 2 to 2.5 times the height of the bulb;

Grouping – small bulbs look best when planted in clusters of 5 or 7 in a group, you can dig one large hole and plant them together spaced out at the base of the hole.

You can also plant into your lawn but wait until October when you'd finished cutting it and the weather is wetter.

Summer Bedding

Many summer bedding plants in the borders, containers or hanging baskets are now past their best. Remove the plants and put them on your compost heap; the old compost from containers can be re-used as a mulch on your beds or put in the compost heap as well.

Roses

Some Roses are still flowering in September but many will have developed fungal infections on their leaves – black spot or downy mildew most commonly. Remove these leaves from the plant and soil around it and either burn them or put them in your bin do NOT compost them as the fungal spores on the leaves will overwinter and re-infect your plants next year. Tie in new growth if you have climbing roses but wait until next month to start any serious pruning, just keep up with deadheading to promote more flowers.

Deadheading and tidying herbaceous perennials

Herbaceous Perennials are plants that live for many years but don't have woody stems (like shrubs and trees) in the autumn you need to remove the old growth to reduce pests and diseases. If you are collecting seeds remember to leave a few seed heads intact when you are tidying your garden. Also some seed heads look attractive during the autumn – I always leave the seed heads of ornamental grasses, Astilbe, Acanthus, Nigella, Teasels, Clematis, Rose Hips etc. until they look tatty. You should leave the seed heads on Sedum to protect the plants from frost and only remove them in the spring.

But when you do remove seed heads cut the flower stalk right down to the bottom of the plant and also remove any damaged or dying leaves as these can harbour pests and diseases and provide an ideal damp hiding place for slugs!

Perennials have different growth patterns in the autumn and winter. Evergreen plants such as Hellebores, Epimedium and ferns continue to grow, although more slowly, so you should leave most of their leaves in place – just removing the damaged or diseased ones. Some plants are semi-evergreen and retain some leaves through winter, although they do not grow - examples of these are Pulmonaria, Alchemilla Mollis (Lady's Mantle), Foxgloves, some hardy Geraniums. Other plants lose all their leaves and disappear underground over the winter and can easily be forgotten about – these types include Astilbe, some Hardy Geraniums, all bulbs, Hostas.

Lawns

You will need to keep cutting your lawn during September as grasses thrive in cooler, moist conditions, but raise the height of your cut a little as the grass will not be growing as quickly as it does in the spring.

If you have a meadow lawn let your flowers set seed and leave the seed heads intact during this month. It may look a little tatty, but it is essential that you let the flowers have a chance to re-seed themselves for next year.