

WHAT TO DO IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH: **OCTOBER**

The dying leaves of trees and shrubs and the beautiful flowers of late perennials make October one of the most colourful months of the year. The colours span the spectrum from pale gold to deepest copper, purple and red. The sun's rays grow weaker and the days shorten to indicate that winter is not far away. This is a good time to plan for next spring...

TASK LIST

- One last effort at weeding will help to improve the appearance of your garden throughout the winter. Any eliminated weed now will possibly prevent thousands of weed seeds from sprouting next spring! A mulch of well-rotted organic matter applied over your weed-free areas will help to prevent the return of weeds and will also release nutrients slowly into the soil.

- This is a good month to increase your garden stock – either buying new plants from garden centres such as ourselves, or making more of your own from division or hardwood cuttings. Newly planted shrubs and perennials can put down roots before the cold weather arrives to give them a good start and always remember to ensure they have sufficient water for their first year.

- Now is the time to discard any summer bedding you may have in pots and baskets. Replant your containers with a new selection to provide colour and interest right through autumn and into spring. Mix pansies and primroses with ivies and more structural plants such as euonymus, grasses, cordylines or dwarf conifers.

- Continue planting bulbs for spring-flowering displays. The favourites for this month include crocuses, daffodils, irises, anemones, hyacinths, fritillarias and small bulbs for rockeries. Prepared hyacinths can still be planted for a stunning display indoors.

- Tender summer bulbs, corms and tubers such as dahlias, cannas, gladioli and begonias should be lifted now and stored for the winter. Cut back any top growth, remove as much soil as possible and store them in shallow boxes of sawdust, dry peat or even shredded newspaper in a cool, frost-free place.

- Clean out the greenhouse and put up insulation if you are using it through the winter. Tender perennials such as fuchsias, pelargoniums, callistemon, argyranthemums and abutilons can be over-wintered under cover of an insulated greenhouse or in a conservatory.

- Finish picking tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, marrows, apples, pears and late-fruiting blackberries and raspberries. If storing fruit and vegetables always ensure that they are clean and dry and free from any sign of damage or infection.

- The garden often produces large quantities of waste in the autumn (think of all those leaves!) so think about creating a composting area for recycling all that lovely organic material, to which you can add your kitchen waste, ready to recycle next year.

PLANTS TO ENJOY THIS MONTH

Acer (Maple), Amelanchier, Arbutus, Aster, Berberis, Calluna, Cotoneaster, Cornus kousa, Cortaderia, Cotinus, Crataegus (Hawthorn), Cyclamen alpinum, Erica, Erigeron, Euonymus, Fatsia japonica, Fothergilla, Gentiana sino-ornata, Ginkgo, Hebe, Malus, Pyracantha, Rhus typhina (Sumach), Skimmia japonica, Symphoricarpos (Snowberry), Viburnum

DIANA'S CHOICE

An unusual ornamental plant that may produce edible fruit (the Cape Gooseberry) is the Chinese Lantern or *physalis franchetii*. This is a rather untidy-looking perennial which can become invasive once it takes hold but is blessed with attractive lantern-shaped, bright orange papery calix covering round, orange-red fruit. The actual flowers are insignificant but left to fruit provide useful dried flower decorations in winter.

