

Buzz Around the Garden During October & November

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The Garden in October

October is the month for autumn colour, the optimum week tending to be the very last week of the month in these parts. Autumn colour is governed by several factors including the physics of light and colour, plant pigments and climatic conditions.

As the days get shorter and temperatures get cooler in the autumn, the green pigment in the leaves, (chlorophyll) declines, allowing other pigments (carotenoids, anthocyanins and tannins) to show. Carotenoids account for the yellow and golden colours whereas anthocyanin pigments are responsible for the pink, red and purple leaves.

Warm, sunny days followed by cool nights with temperatures below 45°F (7o°C), but not freezing, favour the formation of bright, red autumn colour. Freezing temperatures reduce the brilliance of autumn leaf colour by killing or severely injuring the leaves. The degree of colour can vary from tree to tree as well, since leaves exposed to the sun may turn red while others in the shade may be yellow. A cloudy



autumn with warmer nights will not produce good autumn colour.

Personally I prefer the idea that autumn colour is down to Jack Frost who supposedly brings reds and purples to the shrubs and trees by pinching the leaves with his icy fingers. The hues of yellow, gold, and brown are mixed on his paint palette and applied with quick broad strokes of his brush as he silently moves through the gardens.....

Dahlias which have now come back into fashion provide much of the flower colour in the October garden. They will flower happily well into October but their leaves will turn black and wilt as soon as the first frost strikes. When this happens cut them to the ground and protect the tuber over winter.

October notes

Baskets and Containers
Clear all tubs, hanging baskets and window boxes of summer

(ivies for example), spring flowering bulbs, polyanthus, primroses, pansies and heathers.
Borders



bedding plant. Before re-planting with winter and spring interest plants, replace the compost - old compost can hold disease and viruses.

The key plants for containers over winter are evergreens

A good clear up of the borders at this time of the year makes life easier next spring. Remove and compost summer bedding and cut the old foliage of perennials to the ground leaving good seedheads for the birds.

Plant next years spring bulbs (but not tulips until November) and spring flowers such as Foxgloves, Hardy Heathers, Wallflowers, Forget-me-nots, Sweet William, Polyanthus and spring bedding plants such as aubrietia, alyssum and winter pansies. It's also a good time to plant shrubs & trees.

Lawns

Make the last cuts of the lawn longer, at an inch or so, to strengthen the grass through the cold months and give it some foliage to live on. Rake off fallen leaves regularly and keep them in a black bin liner until next summer when they can be added to the compost heap. Don't let them lie in wet heaps for long, or they will damage the grass underneath.

The damp atmosphere provides ideal conditions

to carry out all lawn work, creating new lawns or repairing, aerating and scarifying existing ones.

Pruning and Training
Finish clipping topiary and hedges.

Make sure the long stems of climbers are tied in before winter winds can tear them off. Reduce the shoots of roses and quick growing shrubs such as buddleja and lavertera by a third to prevent wind rock and check all shrubs and trees for damage and disease which should be pruned out.

Propagation

Take hardwood cuttings of buddleias, forsythia, fancy elders, currants and gooseberries, by simply sticking strong 12-inch cuttings two-thirds into the ground where you want them to grow.

Enjoy your gardening.

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