

10 JOBS FOR OCTOBER IN THE VEG GARDEN

1. If you would like juicy, tender, rhubarb stems, tend to them now. After it's rained, cut off any old leaves and mulch each plant with approx 8cm (3in) of well-rotted manure which will feed and nourish the soil.

2. If you haven't already done so, now's a good time to erect windbreaks. The cold, winter winds can damage plants and trees and burn leaves. We mostly experience south-westerlies in this part of the world but the bitter north-easterly winter winds can cause lots of problems too. The



windbreaks don't need to be solid structures. In fact they might do more harm than good as the wind can whip over the top, then down again causing a vortex effect. Instead, filtering the wind with windbreak fabric, a cheap chicken wire fence or a more ornamental living willow structure will give protection. (Contact Heike Kahle at Baurnafea WillowWorks on heikeklaus@eircom.net for more information on living willow structures.)

3. Disconnect hoses so that the water doesn't freeze inside them if sudden frosts occur, causing them to split.
4. Keep an eye on the weather forecast and consider buying an outdoor thermometer so that you can protect frost tender plants with horticultural fleece. The fleece can be pulled back during the day making the most of the warmth and light of the autumn sun.

If the thermometer has a minimum and maximum gauge, you will start to develop an understanding of your local weather conditions, which will help you plan which crops will fare better in your own garden or allotment.

5. Don't clear all the weeds away in your winter clean up - save a patch for the predatory insects that can overwinter in overgrown areas.
6. Test the pH of your soil. The autumn months are the best time to add ground limestone (if you're gardening organically) for alkaline loving plants such as cabbages. The pH kits should all have guidelines on how much lime to add.
7. Start a compost trench. These are great for beds that will hold beans, peas, courgettes and pumpkins during the next growing season.

Dig a trench one spade width by one spade deep. Line with newspaper then add a layer of kitchen waste. Cover the layer with soil. This will help with the decomposition of the vegetables and put off scavenging animals. When the trench is full, cover with any remaining soil and leave to settle for 6 - 8 weeks. Plants can then be sown directly in planting holes on top.

8. Lift carrots and store before the frosts. Parsnips however, are said to taste better if they're exposed to a frost.
9. Bring in pumpkins and winter squashes before the first frosts. Space them out indoors to dry until the skins have turned completely hard.



10. Remove dead or dying leaves from around Brassica plants (cabbages, kale etc) to discourage disease and help air flow.

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Suggested Varieties to Sow/Plant Now:

Broad Beans - although they can be sown directly into the soil, starting them off in individual pots or propagator trays will get them off to a good start. (Try Sutton or Aquadulce Claudia)

Garlic - Buy disease free bulbs from reputable suppliers, separate cloves and plant them, pointed end up, 15cm (6in) apart. Firm in gently so that

the tips are just below the surface. (Try Solent Wight. Some varieties such as Illico have an edible flower.)

Winter Spinach - is less likely to bolt than summer varieties. It may need some protection with cloches in mid winter but will start growing again in the spring. Leaves can be picked as soon as they are a reasonable size, starting with the outer leaves. (Try Giant Winter for a hardy variety.)

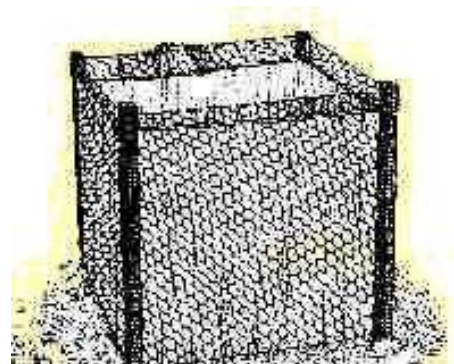
Hardy Peas - Pea varieties need to be hardy to survive the winter months. Sowing into pots or guttering will stop mice and pigeons digging up the tiny seedlings. Plants can be transferred into the ground when they reach about 5-8cm high. (Try Feltham First, Douce Provence.)

Sweet Peas (Fragrantissima, Matucana, Winston Churchill)

Organic Tip for October:

If you don't already have one, make a container to hold leafmould. Leaves can take up to two years to rot down, or a year if they're to be used as a mulch.

To make a bin drive four posts into the ground, with the corners about 1m x 1m. Staple or fix chicken wire around them to make a box.



Either rake up or collect leaves in a lawn mower basket (set on high the mower will chop them up for you). Place them into the bin, water them if they're not already damp and pack them tightly as their volume will reduce by about two thirds as they rot.

Oak and Beech leaves will rot the quickest with Sycamore and Chestnut taking longer.