

# October checklist

## Seeds to sow

*The autumn has truly arrived, which can only mean one thing. We can start our sweet peas.*

### SWEET PEAS (*LATHYRUS ODORATUS*)

I hope you have been saving your loo roll inners for this moment. Fill with multi-purpose compost and put two sweet pea seeds about a centimetre beneath the surface. Water thoroughly once and leave in a warm place. As soon as the green tips are up, put them out into the cold, check for any slugs in the environs, and then leave them until spring.

### HARDY ANNUALS

If you are in a very mild climate, and the first frost is still some time away, you could start some more hardy annuals under glass.

### SEEDS THAT NEED CHILLING

Stratification means the exposing of seed to cold to trigger germination. That is, some seeds need to know it has been winter before they sense spring. You can do this by sowing the seed in the ground before the cold sets in, put them in a seed tray outdoors, or cheat. Cheating just means putting the seeds in a ziplock bag with

some moist compost and bunging them in the freezer for a few weeks.

Works a treat for:

- / Aquilegia
- / Larkspur & delphiniums
- / Icelandic poppies
- / Clematis (worth trying from seed)
- / Thalictrum

## Flowers to harvest

### THE TRUE AUTUMNALS

- / The last dahlias
- / The very very last sweet peas
- / Japanese anemones
- / Achillea
- / Gaura
- / Hydrangeas for drying
- / Eryngium seed heads
- / Sanguisorba
- / The branches of turning foliage
- / Amelanchier leaves & berries
- / Crab apples
- / Rose hips
- / Grass seed heads
- / Foraged hedgerow fruit and foliage
- / Big beech branches in gold & mustard
- / Ferns & brackens

## *Other jobs for this month*

### */ What not to do*

Don't tidy up and don't cut down the skeletons of the flowers and plants. The seed heads will feed the birds and the fallen and decomposing foliage will give a place for wildlife as well as feeding the soil microbes. Channel your inner Piet Oudolf and leave it standing.

### */ Plant out perennials*

If your soil is still warm enough then getting plants into the ground is absolutely worth it. I find early October to be a good time; they have just enough time to settle in before the big cold and then they will be ready to put on some amazing growth come spring.

### */ Sow winter leaves under glass*

Just a few greens make all the difference in the world. Oriental leaves, microgreens and pea tops give a shot of green in the autumn months. I love pea tops. I always have a pot on the go on the kitchen windowsill.

### */ Take hardwood cuttings*

Shrubs can be expensive but indispensable in a cutting garden. Expand your stock by cutting into woody stems and putting into pots of mixed grit and compost. Try Viburnum, Physocarpus, Abelia & Philadelphus (mock orange).

### */ Compost care*

Keep adding to and turning your compost heap. Aim to have some ready for top-dressing your beds before the cold weather sets in.

*/ If you have dahlias and their foliage has been blackened by the frost, it is time to either lift or mulch. It is the damp that will get them as much as the cold, so if you have good drainage and a mild climate, mulch with compost or straw.*

### */ Divide your herbaceous perennials*

You can be surprisingly brutal with this although the chunks should be big enough to give flowers soon (think a minimum of a 9cm pot; if you wouldn't buy it in a garden centre then it's probably too small).

### */ Plant narcissi & alliums*

Many bulbs for spring flowering will benefit from being planted whilst there is warmth in the soil. Leave tulips until December though, they need cold.

Did I mention you should order your tulips now?