

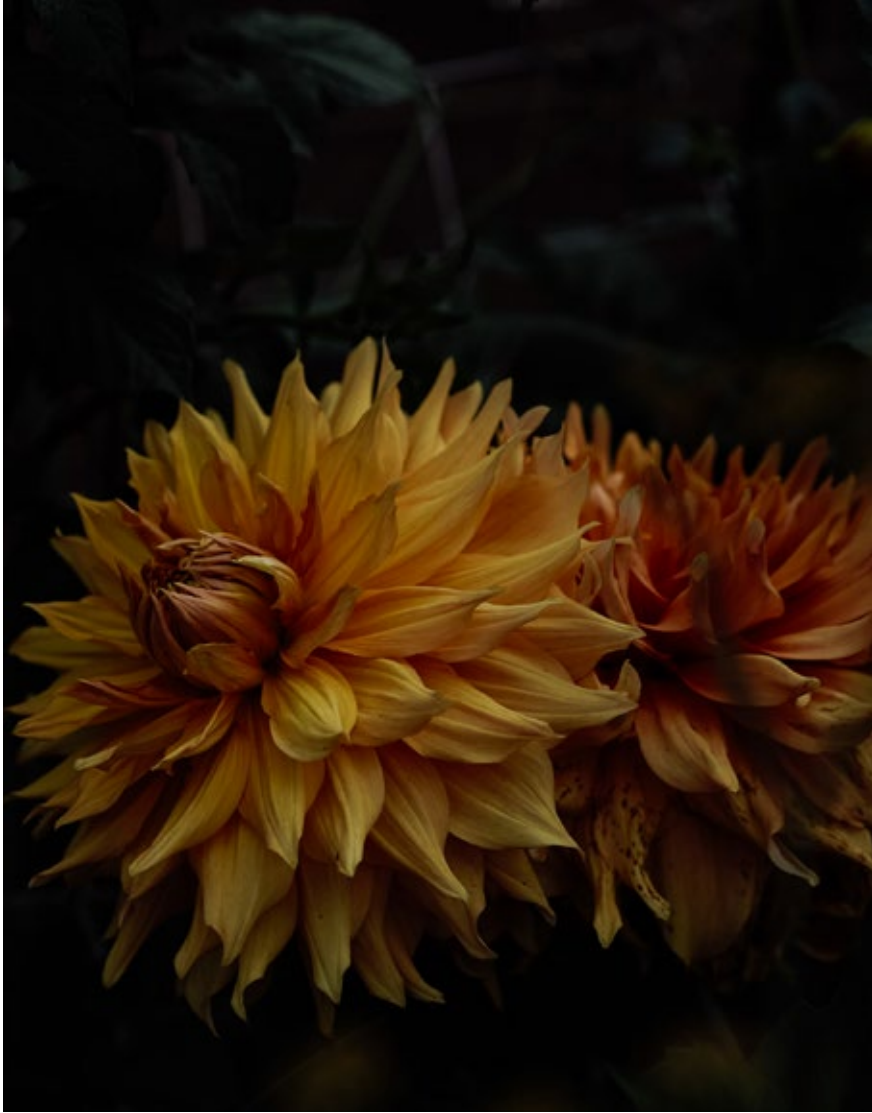
GATHER · HARVEST



GATHER · HARVEST

Through Gather, I publish growing guides for our favourite flowers as well as digital, seasonal journals, capturing the changing seasons in flowers, landscapes, food and forms.

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Contents

/ p. 05 :
PREFACE

/ p. 07 :
HARVEST
The season of mists

/ p. 09 :
AUGUST
Lamas & onwards

/ p. 12 :
01 DAHLIAS
Everything I know

/ p. 27 :
JOBS FOR AUGUST
Seeds to sow & flowers to harvest

/ p. 33 :
SEPTEMBER
The autumn equinox

/ p. 35 :
THE GREEN GRASS
A folk song

/ p. 37 :
02 AUTUMN SOWING ANNUALS
The why & the how

/ p. 43 :
JOBS FOR SEPTEMBER
Seed sowing & collecting

/ p. 49 :
03 SEED SAVING
Tips & tricks

/ p. 52 :
04 A SUFEIT OF SEED
Recipes for poppy biscuits

PREFACE

The slow tide of summer turns.

August is replete with indolence.
Time in the hammock. The scent of
roses that drifts, mingling with the
thick sugary musk of sweet peas. The
first dahlias, and the second and the
third and the fourth.

Always dahlias.

Plums; in August with ice cream, in
September with custard.

Golden light and burnished tones of
late summer. Suppers under the apple
trees as the sun dips low.

Make the most.

For the year is slipping away.



HARVEST

The tones in the light and in the flowers warm and soothe at this time of year. The grasses are no longer sharp, acid green blades, but soft, textural seed-heads. There is a sprig of bronze fennel on the table. Drying honesty, hung in swags in the kitchen. A late rose in a bud vase by the bed. The sound of combine harvesters in the fields.

Our own harvests too, on a smaller scale. Flowers, of course, by the armful. But also fruit and vegetables, and the first seeds. A flood of poppy seeds flowing from the drumstick heads. Sweet pea pods twisting and popping. Picking the velcro-hooked wild carrot sticky burrs off a jumper and the dogs.

This journal guides you through the highlights of this golden time. Everything you need to know about dahlias to get the most opulent and the most abundant buckets and buckets of dahlias. How to guarantee floral abundance and joy next year by collecting the generous seeds your flowers give you now, and sowing those hardy ones for getting a jumps start on the next season.

There are rich, bruised images reflecting the depth of the colours at this turning of the year. There is a recipe for what you can do with the poppy seeds you don't sow, because no-one needs a million poppies.



AUGUST

Lammas & onwards

*Live in the moment, with an eye
on the future.*

August is a tricky month.

*It is oh so easy to put one's feet
up, or to decamp to somewhere
glamorous and poolside, but your
garden will thank you for a little
additional attentiveness in this
dreamiest of months.*

1 AUGUST

I use the rain as an excuse for a slow day. I bake dark, tangy sourdough rye bread, laced with treacle. I drink tea and watch the eventing.

Sunflowers on the table. Bees in the hedge germander. Courgettes in the kitchen.

5 AUGUST

I drive through the village and up the hill onto the Blackdowns. It is clear blue heat in the village, and the hills have a cap of mist. It is like driving through a cloud. As I reach Devon, a grey fog rolls across the sky and rain hammers down in stair rods. I feel grateful for the water on the garden but when I get home, the sun is out again and the ground is as dry as it was when I left. Many of the roses are putting on a second show and I give them a good soak with a tot of seaweed.

6 AUGUST

Plums again. I said last week that the Victoria plum tree will not be ready for a few weeks, but the steady dose of sunshine has brought it on. Bowls are brought inside, some eaten before I have got down the garden path, others roasted with the syrup from a bottle of stem ginger and a single star anise.



01

A STUDY IN DAHLIAS

Dahlias are the flower season's last hurrah. The roses might have a second flush if you are lucky, but as we all slump into late summer, it is the dahlias that carry us through.

It might be my imagination (or that I select only the warm colours) but their very form is autumnal, a little more rigid in shape than other, high summer flowers and they are at their very best in the rusts, ochres and deep oranges.

Even the most lusted after dahlia in the history of gardening, the 'cafe au lait', is soft and warm in its tones, and looks extra special against turning bracken and golden beech.

There are options for pots, but I do find that dahlias are happiest in deep rich soil. Add compost and a mulch if you can. They may take a little while to hit their stride if the plants are young, but once they get going, you won't know what to do with them.

If you are new to growing dahlias, there is one thing you must know; that they are from South America and they are tender. This means that they will be killed by cold, wet soil.

Tubers, cuttings and plants (try Withypitts and Halls of Heddon) started in late spring will be big enough to flower by summer, and be ready for lifting after the first frost.



CAFE AU LAIT

MY FAVOURITE DAHLIAS

Be still my beating heart. Dinnerplate dahlias might divide opinion, but I am firmly on the side of the opulent on this one. Unusually so. My taste is usually a bit austere, a bit plain and minimalist, I may even be said to aspire to the Shaker aesthetic. My clothes are varying shades of tweedy brown, cream, and navy blue.

I am therefore as surprised as you are that the flower that has given me the most pleasure this year is a massive, swirly, monstrosity of a thing that was described in the catalogue as 'large, bright red blooms with slightly twisted petals that show the silver reverse'.

Welcome to my life, Bryn Terfel.

The colour is softer than the true red 'Spartacus' dinnerplate dahlia, and it is shaggier than both the Café au Lait and the Hamari Golds. Bryn Terfel is messy and wild and I absolutely adore it.

There are softer dinnerplate dahlias; I strongly recommend Labyrinth and Fairway Spur. Both incredibly lovely.

The complaint about dinnerplates is they are too big to do anything with, and they always come into bloom very late. The issue of size I would address by saying there are plenty of times where you need a really big flower, but there are always the side shoots and the small blooms that come later in the season. Ok, they aren't really much smaller, you just have to make a feature of the size and not try and hide it.

The issue of them coming into bloom late?

Good things come to those who wait.

Next page, clockwise from top left: hamari gold, fairway spur, bryn terfel, spartacus



WHERE TO LOOK FOR INSPIRATION

Over the summer, keep a note of varieties you see that you love. Phillipa Stewart's website and Instagram (she's not called Just Dahlias without reason) is incredible.

I always adore Becca's (The Garden Gate Flower Company) use of dahlias and she often finds a way to make an unexpectedly ugly dahlia (I'm looking at you Edinburgh) somehow look wonderful.

Although Erin no longer ships or sells dahlias, she has left her shop up which acts as an amazing catalogue for some of the most astonishingly beautiful varieties. I strongly recommend having a look at her website and if it doesn't make you want to write Jowey Winnie on your wish list, I don't know what's wrong with you.

TOP TIPS FOR BEST BLOOMS

feed

I think this is almost less important than keeping them well watered, but a bit of tomato feed or a raking of chicken manure pellets will go down a treat. I recommend once a fortnight when they are really in full flower.

timing

Don't look at the front, look round the back. If the petals are starting to fold backwards or are drying, then the flower has a limited life span. I find ones that are about three quarters out are the best. Cut into water, strip the foliage, and let them have a good long drink.

be bold

The first time you harvest dahlias, you realise that you have to balance stem length and number of blooms. If you want to have any sort of stem at all on your dahlias, you are going to have to sacrifice some buds. Follow the stem down a few nodes (the point where leaves and shoots connect to the main stem) and cut deep. I know. It'll grow back and better, I promise.

deadhead

The more you cut, the more will come, but you do need to be able to tell the difference between flowers that are over and flowers that are yet to come. When I was leading a garden tour around Forde Abbey once, a visitor came up to me thinking I was a gardener (you can see why) and questioned me for a good ten minutes on why their dahlias were covered in buds but never flowered. I would bet ten pounds and the spaniel that they were looking at spent flowers and thinking they were buds. Spent flowers are pointy and, if you squeeze them, moisture comes out. The buds that you want to leave on a snub-nosed and a bit glossier looking.

If you have not kept up with the dead heading, you can always pretend that you are leaving them to dry for seed. Some dahlias grow enthusiastically from seed, although it is a lottery as to what you will get as they are likely to cross pollinate. Erin of Floret is doing a lot on dahlias breeding at the moment, but this is beyond the scope of this guide (and my expertise).

The best practice in dead-heading is to follow the stem down to a joint and cut there and obviously, if you are there with a trug and snips, crack on. If you are walking past and on your way somewhere else, just snap them off. You can always tidy them up later. Don't let perfect be the enemy of good. We're all just getting by.



MINLEY CAROL

7 AUGUST

I cannot wait. I shop carefully for the best buffalo mozzarella. I pull out the best Babylonstoren olive oil. I wipe down the best platters.

The tomato harvest has arrived.

I grew all sorts of different ones: Christmas grapes, brown berries and the jet black Indigo Rose. But an old packet of Franchi Costoluto Fiorentino proved to be the absolute winner. You get a lot of seeds in a pack so I grew a lot of plants, and the germination rate was excellent despite the packet being many years old. (I know; do as I say not as I do.)

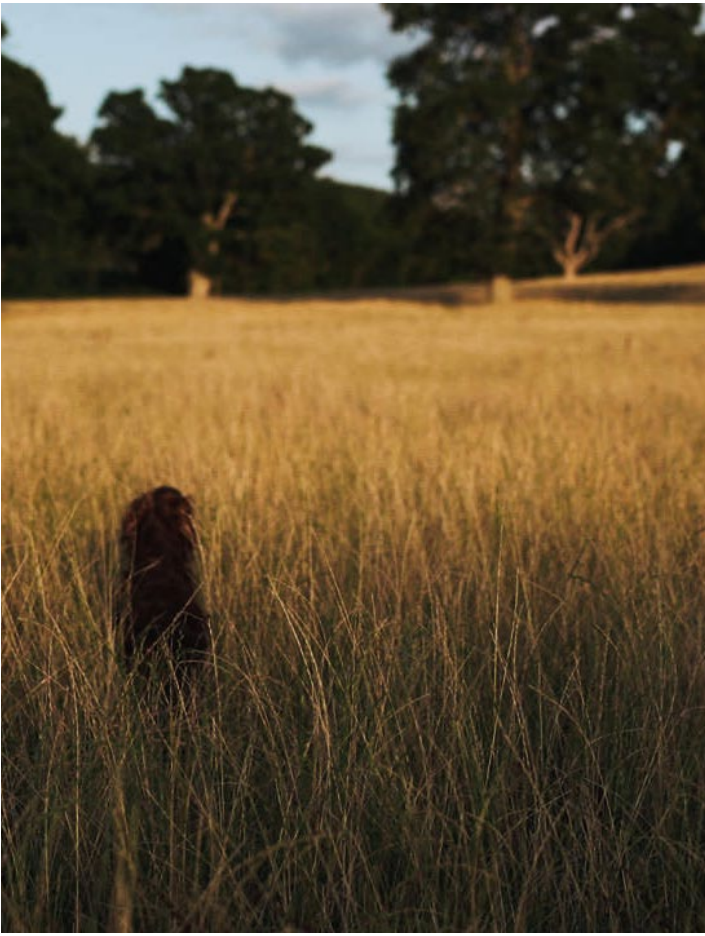
Despite putting slightly too many plants in each crate, each vine has an amazing crop of huge, fat, absolutely glorious, ribbed, beefsteak tomatoes.

Have you ever ever smelt anything like a freshly picked tomato on a hot summer's evening?

10 AUGUST

There is a moment in the year where I have to take my chances. I am still sowing seeds but when they flower will be down to the seasons. If we have a long, warm autumn, I will get flowers this year. A last hurrah as we go into the mild West Country winter. (The true hardy annual sowing will happen in early September, don't worry.)

I have never ever seen sloe trees as heavy with fruit as they are right now and that does portend a long, harsh winter. If the cold comes early, the hardy annuals will simply halt and wait until spring.



15 AUGUST

This is a public service announcement. If you are growing beans, tomatoes or courgettes, pick them daily. Hourly if you can. With a glut of chard as well, many of the meals we eat are now quite green and home-grown. With a big tub of soft ewe's cheese from Durslade Farm Shop and a few boxes of eggs, I think I am set until September.

18 AUGUST

Swallows, swifts or house martins. I confess, I cannot tell the difference. But this week has been all about the swooping. Golden fields and long shadows are the backdrop for aerial acrobatics. This year's don't seem to chase the dogs, which is a shame, because that really is one of the funniest things.

20 AUGUST

The dyeing garden, after a slow start, is looking wonderful. The Hopi sunflowers are huge and I have harvested the first heads. Rowena has sent me pictures of her first dye pot and I think these are going to be absolutely astonishing. The dyer's chamomile is also tall and bursting into bloom. I will dry these and add them to the stash that I already have stored in the studio.

22 AUGUST

A glorious evening. So perfect we take gin on the evening dog walk and sit on the crest of the hill but the woods and look over the vale towards the Quantocks. Hugo sits on the picnic blanket waiting for the olives to be served (we didn't take any) and the girls race up and down the slope chasing imaginary pheasants.



JOBS FOR
AUGUST:



Seeds to sow & flowers to harvest

Before I launch into lists, some advice.

Firstly, keep watering. Not little and often, that only encourages shallow, thirsty roots. Once a week, if there has been no meaningful rain, give everything a really good soak. Pots in hot weather? Every day. And give your roses a feed.

Secondly, keep cutting. As many flowers as bloom and start to set seed, snip them off. If you want from the house, you will get the best vase life if you cut them much earlier as they are just starting to open.

The only exception is if you are saving seed. I have already started to collect opium poppy seed by the end of July, and sweet pea seed by the second week of August.

SEEDS TO SOW

Hardy annuals

- / Agrostemma (corncockle)
- / Ammi majus
- / Bells of Ireland
- / Bladder campion
- / Borage
- / Bronze Fennel
- / Chicory
- / Cornflowers
- / Cerinthe
- / Dill
- / Dog daisy
- / Grasses (all of them)
- / Larkspur
- / Marigolds
- / Nigellas
- / Opium poppy
- / Orlaya Grandiflora
- / Scabiosa
- / Teasel
- / Viola tricolor
- / Wallflowers
- / Wild carrot

STARTING PERENNIALS

My flower field, Malus Farm, is being guided more and more by regenerative principles and that means the surface of the soil should be covered, and the underneath of the soil should be as undisturbed as possible. & that means as much permanent planting - perennials - as possible.

We are fast approaching the 'Second Spring' where rate of germination and growth is second only to the first flush of the year, so I am getting ahead with my perennial seeds.

- / Achillea
- / Verbascum
- / Cephalaria gigantea
- / Gaura
- / Hollyhocks
- / Dianthus (Try D.carthusianorum)
- / Echinaceas (I favour E.pallida)
- / Echinops and Eryngium
- / Bupleurum
- / Rudbeckia triloba

If you aren't ready for perennials, then scattering phacelia as a cover crop on any patches of empty ground will do wonders for the health of your soil.

HARVESTING IN AUGUST

Everything should be looking glorious right now. I have roses and honeysuckle and achillea and drying ammi. The grasses are peaking (many are better if you leave them to grown on and then start to dry). There are sanguisorbas everywhere, reaching the sky.

The opium poppies are cut and hanging upside down from hooks in the bootroom. The ravenswing seed is in danger of taking matters into its own hands if I don't capture them in an envelope, and the earliest of the grasses are very much ready to fly.

One sweet pea plant has scrambled sideways into a hedge of beech and honeysuckle and the other has obligingly set pods. I am keeping an eye on them and just as they start to brown and crackle, I will catch them.

Now is the time for starting seed collecting. Once you are self sufficient for seed, you have everything you will ever need.



SEPTEMBER

The autumnal equinox

The start of my favourite season



A FOLK SONG: THE GREEN GRASS

*Collected from Moses Mansfield by Clive Carey and
Iolo Williams*

The sun is gone down and the sky it looks red
And down on my pillow where I lays my head
I lift up my eyes for to see those stars shine
And thoughts of my true love still runs in my mind

The sap is gone up and the trees they will flaw
We'll branch them all round, boys, and clap in the saw
We'll saw them asunder and tumble them down
And there we will flow them all on the cold ground

Our scythes we will handle and boldly will swing
Till the very next meeting that's now coming on
We'll cut down our grass, boys, and carry it away
We'll first call it green grass and then call it hay

Now haying is over and harvest draws near
We will send to the alehouse to brew some strong beer
We'll cut down the corn, boys, and roll it along
We'll take it to the barn, boys, to keep it from harm



02

AUTUMN SOWING HARDY ANNUALS

THE WHY

I know, I know. The sun is big and the sky is blue. The grass needs mowing every ten minutes and you have more dahlias than you know what to do with. Late August is for lolling in hammocks, sliding off to the seaside for some of that cold water swimming, and very possibly a reviving gin. So why am I telling you to think about next year? The spring that is on the other side of this winter that we know is coming but which feels, on these hot, halcyon days, a very long way away.

And you don't have to. You really don't. I have been known (and I will probably again) do all my seed sowing in spring and damn the consequences. Flowers are flowers and if they are for

me, for seed or for cutting or for the photography, then it doesn't really matter when they are out. However, there is something fantastically circular of life of taking the seeds off a flower in one bed and putting it straight into a soft, hoed, prepared bed in one movement of the hand.

They were going to self-sow everywhere anyway; me moving them where I want them simply saved me having to step over them for six months when they germinate in the middle of the path.

And the thing about the weather being warm and glorious now and it not feeling like now is the time for seed sowing is exactly the reason why you should be seed sowing.

The warmth of the ground, the strength of the sun and the frequent rain that characterises late summer in Somerset means that this time of the year is second only to the height of spring in terms of growing magic. Put a hardy annual seed in the ground now, and they should burst into life, grow into small plants and then sit happily as the cold season comes and goes, and then put out more flowers earlier.

Something I forget every single year is that autumn sown ammi majus comes out at exactly the same time as cow parsley. It is a wasted spot, but I grow it anyway. Oh ok, I admit, it self-sows so technically it decides to be autumn-sown.

THE HOW

I hope I have persuaded you as to the why, and so on to the how.

The first option is the lowest input both in terms of your effort and resources. Clear some ground, make a drill with the end of your trowel,

sprinkle the seed in sparingly, cover and water.

A note on spacing. I space absolutely everything in rows a trowel length apart. I sow more than I need in drills (I have a lot of seeds...) and then thin to a trowel's length apart in the drills.

Because I am entirely unable to kill a living thing, I tend to replant my thinnings in other places. If you are more ruthless than me, compost them. It's for the best.

The second option is for those of us who have beds full of abundance in August. The dahlias, the sweet peas, even my scabious are still going great guns. You don't want to pull them out and you can't sow under established plants (no light) and so the way to get around this is to sow in pots or module trays and then tuck them straight in the ground when you have lifted the dahlias or the sweet peas have flowered their last.

There is tonnes of info on indirect sowing in my seed sowing guide which

you can download from the Gather website. A few extra tips though: I will remind you about the key importance of timely watering.

At this time of year, you can ignore everything about heat mats etc.

If you do not have a greenhouse, just make sure where you have put your seed trays is relatively slug free.

I am not above starting them on the kitchen windowsill simply to make sure they aren't grazed off as the seedlings emerge. My courtyard is great for keeping an eye on things but there is a lot of hard landscaping, concrete etc, and it is very easy for slugs to hide in the cool damp corners.



THE AUTUMNAL EQUINOX

Something strange is happening.

As we approach the second equinox of the year, in amongst the ripening pumpkins and the turning leaves, there is blossom.

There are second (third?) flushes of flowers as the early sow annuals have set seed and flowered again. At least, that is my explanation as to why there are blue stars of borage in the meadow and swathes of black scabious.

Now why the hedge has odd pops of blossom in it, I have no idea.



4 SEPTEMBER

The apples are falling from the trees with regular thuds. I pick the pears before they fall as the tree is in a container in the courtyard and I don't want them to bruise. Two catch me out by being the shell of a pear skin but full of wasps rather than fruit.

I planted two damson trees last year (our Shropshire Prune proved to be a martyr to leaf curl aphid). I did not think they would have fruited yet and I was wondering how I would make pickled damsons. I am therefore delighted to find that the Fairleigh damson from Pennards in the kitchen garden hedge has fruit on in its first year.

5 SEPTEMBER

Church flowers. My time again. I fill an urn with dahlias and crab-apples and some grasses. I take the grasses out again because they look a bit messy and unconventional and I am not sure they will go down well. I am already maverick enough by eschewing oasis and I feel like I have the reputation of the #foamfree community on my hands. Nothing too radical. My investment is such that they get at least three of my best Café au Lait dahlias.

6 SEPTEMBER

It is raining. I was going to finish preparing the new beds for fruit, spread the lovely new compost and paint the inside of my studio. Instead, there will be tea and film editing, and hardy annual sowing to make the most of the moisture. Taking cosmos cuttings. A gentle sort of day. A Sunday sort of day.

The field is full of flowers to harvest in
golds and rusts, and the hedgerows are
full of glorious bounty for foraging.
I have been known to bring branches
of sloes into the cottage. Their smoky
purple tones are unlike anything
else. Pair with springs of blackberries
for an autumnal display. Mind the
thorns on both though.

JOBS FOR SEPTEMBER:

Little happens in my life without a deadline. There is a jumble of 'wouldn't it be lovely tos' (jam-making, reading novels, a weekend away to the Gunard's Head, painting my toenails gold), the 'I really should's' (brushing the dogs, booking someone to look at the dry rot, switching my electricity supplier over), and there are the 'musts'.

Musts come from promises I have made to others, report deadlines, dates in the diary that refuse to shift and, increasingly in September, musts come from the passing of days as we slide in autumn.

Only musts really happen in my life, and so this is what I have been fitting in before the window of opportunity for sowing hardy annuals closes.

SOWING HARDY ANNUALS

Before the equinox is best and so there really is a date deadline for this one. I have written a lot on this but if you are not sure what you are doing, it is probably best to just chuck

some seed around and risk it, than try and do things perfectly and not get anything in the ground. You'd be amazed how much seeds want to grow. I think they are sensing the deadline too.

COLLECTING SEED

Given my obsession with this, there is a whole chapter on this. Consider yourself lucky I didn't write a book.

Yesterday, I held the very first of my Piggy Sue sweet pea harvest in my hand. I was only really testing them and I opened one of the pods that had turned a pale blonde and there they were; a row of utterly perfect black peas.

I was only doing it in passing so I didn't have anything with me for collecting, so the inaugural harvest is currently in my jeans pocket with a piece of string and some dog biscuits.

However, this week, I will be much more organised and take envelopes, bowls, jars, labels and bags out with me.

The deadline on this one is also a firm one; miss your moment and the seeds will be scattered to the four winds. For sweet peas, the colour you are looking for is on the next page. Anything lighter isn't ready.

If you are feeling lucky/experimental/curious/brave, then saving dahlia seeds is always a laugh. I have a few of the single ones which have fully dried (deadheading dahlias got stuck on the 'I really should' list but as I just grow them recreationally for me, I didn't stress unduly) and the seeds just fall out. Sow in spring, not now.

COMPOST

Emptying the finished compost heap, I top dress the beds where I know there is poorer soil, and start laying a new heap.

There are a few beds around the place with swiss chard in. I love it, it's a great winter veg and I defy anyone not to get through tonnes of it in the cold, dark months once they have perfected Nigel Slater's chard gratin. I sowed it in thick lines in one of the beds in the

kitchen garden and, once it was up, I took the thinnings and planted some in another bed, and some in a bed in the flower field.

The chard left in the original bed is small and, more worryingly, yellowish. The transplants in the other bed in the kitchen garden are small but stronger in colour. The ones in the flower field are a jungle and the most gloriously thick, lush, gorgeous candy-striped green colours.

There is one difference of course, which is that the ones in the kitchen garden, being closer to the back door, get harvested and picked at much more often. However, not enough to account for the difference. It's all in the soil.

If you have been growing on your ground for a while, you will develop a sense for the terroir. Different beds grow very differently based on different drainage, aspect, hot and cold spots, different mycorrhizal systems, all sorts of things. Some of this you will understand (I know



which beds have been top dressed when and with what) and some of which you won't. The bed that I put the crab apple espaliers in is known to be the cursed bed. Nothing grows in it except ground elder and no, I have absolutely no idea why. I risked a limelight hydrangea recently and even that has just turned its toes up and died.

I'm looking for an oak bench to go in it as the only means of using it without heartbreak.

For all the other beds, I am solving the problem by putting thick layers of compost, that black gold, on top. Some of the beds I have cleared but even where there are plants in situ, I am tucking as much as I can in amongst and around.

Exception to this is bearded irises. You need to be really careful to not cover the rhizome. Ditto peonies, if you pile it on too thick around the crown, they become too deeply buried and you might lose blooms. However, compost does sink remarkably fast as the worms pull it down into the soil, so unless you are putting inches directly on top of the crown, it should

be fine.

We have produced a lot of plant material in the last week. We pulled out the meadow, quite a blissful task because the soil was friable and soft, and few of the plants were deep rooted. I now have a windrow of stems and roots ready to form the basis of a new heap.

Even though this is going to be a slow heap (it is unlikely to get very hot and so I will have to leave it quite a long time) it will need some greens on so I will mix it with one of the hotter heaps which is primarily grass clippings and fresh leaves, add some biodynamic preparations and then leave it to do its thing for as long as I can.

PLANTING OUT BIENNIALS

My foxgloves are starting to look like they really want to get going. They are still in the greenhouse at the moment and I have learned the hard way that over-wintering biennials under glass means zero flowers the next year. They need the cold to trigger flowering. If you are clearing beds of the summer annuals that are over, this would be the perfect time to give them a new

home. If you would like to interplant with tulips then put the biennials out now in their pots so they feel the chill coming on, and then you can put them in the ground at the same time as you put the bulbs in in November.

VOLUNTEERS

I have ammi all over the place and I haven't sown a single one. They have, of course, self-sown in inconvenient places but that is gardening for you; nature and fate have one idea about how to do things, and I have another.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

If you have clumps of herbaceous perennials that are starting to look a bit thuggish, now would be the perfect time to dig them up and split them. 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).

Although it is recommended that sanguisorba is divided in spring, I need to move mine and I want lots of them, so it is going to be done now regardless. There is a bit of growing

time left in the season for them to get some roots down before the winter and I think they'll be fine.

NEW SCHEMES

I have redesigned lots of areas of the garden since we changed the layout and I have bought a lot of new plants. Like with the sanguisorba, there is warmth in the soil, there is a bit of time for them to get settled in their new spot, and they will romp away in the spring.

There is a whole series of blog posts in Gather about the planning of planting schemes, locating them, sourcing and combining plants so I won't say any more now, only to strongly recommend that if you have been seduced into buying any plants recently, get them into the ground sooner rather than later.

Lots of people recommend planting spring bulbs in September. (Not tulips, they need a frost.) I place this firmly in the category of 'wouldn't it be lovely if'. I don't know about you, but I already have got enough on. Consider this permission to carry that over into October.

03

SEED SAVING

START EARLY

If you wait until the autumn and collect the last seeds from exhausted plants, you will get weak plants next year. Find one or two good strong plants and don't cut from them at all.

TOUCH, SIGHT & SOUND

Too early and the seed won't be ripe. Too late and your precious seeds will be scattered to the four winds. Collect seed when it comes loose with a light touch, when they rattle, or when there is a change in colour. Ripe seed will fall into your hand willingly.

The change in colour is almost always from lush green to a deep, autumnal brown. Check daily when you think they are close, just touching or tapping, or unpeel one to see the progress of the seed.

Some seed will dry and ripen even after the flower has been cut (*digitalis*

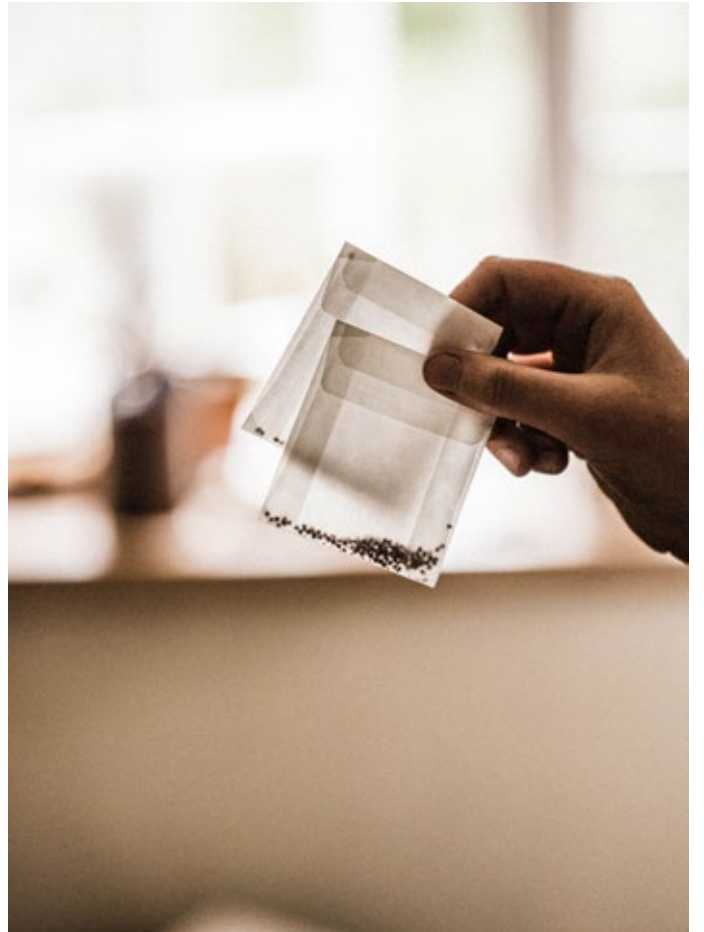
always surprises me like that) but if you possibly can, let it ripen on the plant.

HANDLE WITH CARE

Seed wants to be dispersed so it can be quite tricky to catch. Use a paper bag and a lot of care to maximise your harvest. Putting the bag over the seed head before cutting the stem will help for poppies. Label immediately.

BE MINDFUL OF MOISTURE

Harvest on a dry day, and make sure the seed is free of insects and completely dry before storing. Keep in paper bags or envelopes in a cool, dry, frost free place. If you lucky enough to be at the jam jar scale, then a sachet of silica will be useful. You are aiming for cool and dry conditions if you want to store. Never collect into plastic.





04

DEALING WITH A SURFEIT

If you have never intentionally collected seeds before (and if you have ever met a sticky burr plant, then you have unintentionally) then you can do worse than to start with a poppy. The opium poppies are generous to a fault. One head is enough for a whole bed's worth of plants next year. Which begs the question, what are you going to do with the bags and jars and pots you have painstakingly collected?

The best germination you will ever get is if you don't store at all, and just throw the seed over a cleared bed of beautiful earth. Once you have sprinkled liberally what you want to grow, there are three other options for your poppy seed harvest.

BISCUITS. SOAP. CAKE.

Now, you know about the cake because the Hobbs House Bakery Sourdough and poppy seed lemon cake is the only cake I make and I have told you about it enough times. I can't make soap (go to Hog & Tallow) and that only leaves one thing. Biscuits.

I found two biscuit recipes with poppy seeds in. Both by Gill Meller and both strangely, shortbreads. In the interests of providing you with an informed opinion, I trialled both.

I also ate both. They are both lovely and I genuinely couldn't choose between them, so I have included both.

If it helps, my husband chose the raspberry one.

BROWN BUTTER & POPPY SEED SHORTBREAD

INGREDIENTS

300g unsalted butter
150g golden caster sugar, plus extra for sprinkling
300g plain flour
150g cornflour
1 tbsp poppy seeds

METHOD

Heat the oven to 170C/150C fan/gas mark 3 1/2.

Put the butter in a small heavy-based pan over a low-medium heat. Shake the pan once in a while to stop the butter spitting. Cook for about 5-6 minutes, until the butter smells fragrant and nutty and you see the solids browning on the base of the pan. Skim any foamy bubbles from the top.

Put the sugar in a medium mixing bowl, then pour over the butter, leaving the solids in the base of the pan; mix well. Combine the flour, cornflour and a pinch of fine salt in a separate bowl, then add to the butter and sugar mixture.

Use a spatula to bring everything together to a soft dough.

Spread the dough evenly into the cake tin, pressing it down with a spatula to level it.

Bake for 50-55 minutes until just firm.

Remove from the oven and sprinkle with caster sugar and the poppy seeds. Use a knife to score into rectangular fingers.

When fully cool, cut into fingers.



RASPBERRY & OAT SHORTCAKE

By Gill Meller

INGREDIENTS

125g of unsalted butter, cubed
150g plain flour
50g porridge oats
100g unrefined caster sugar, plus extra
for sprinkling
Pinch of fine sea salt
1 tbsp poppy seeds
250g raspberries
1 tbsp jumbo oats

METHOD

Heat the oven to 190C/170C fan.

Place the cubes of butter in a large mixing bowl with the flour, porridge oats, sugar, and salt. Rub the butter into the flour and sugar until you have a fairly fine texture, then gradually bring the mixture together to form a dough.

Reserve about a fifth of the dough and mix it with the poppy seeds. Line a medium sized baking tray (15x20cm) with baking parchment. Press the shortcake dough out as evenly as you can.

Scatter over the raspberries, then crumble over the remaining poppy dough, just let it fall in pieces wherever it wants to, along with any leftover poppy seeds. Sprinkle over the oats.

Pop the tray in the oven and bake for 35 minutes, or until the shortcake is golden brown and crunchy around the edges. Remove from the oven, allow to cool a little, then cut into pieces.

21 SEPTEMBER

Mist. The most incredible mist. I drive to Shepton Mallet the long way, up to Staple Hill, down Ham Hill where the views reach all the way across the county, past Ilminster, and through the villages. The skies are huge and the views long, each hill in a different shade of grey.

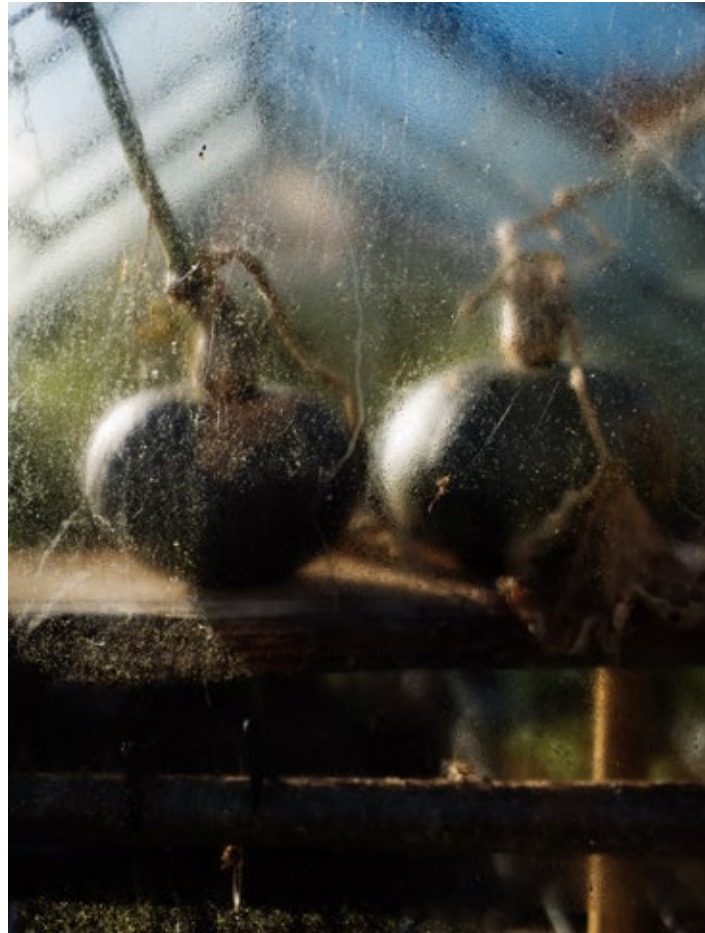
22 SEPTEMBER

My local farm shop. Although I have vines and vines of pumpkins at home, I cannot resist picking up a Kabocha. I grate it and make rosti. It cooks down to a beautifully soft but nutty cake. Topped with sauerkraut and a fried egg. Autumn on a plate.

Anna Jones also has a recipe for pancakes (which are my favourite things) made of squash (my favourite vegetable) and ricotta (my favourite cheese apart from stilton).

23 SEPTEMBER

There is a scent in the air. Dahlias don't really smell, although dried ones do, oddly. It takes me all day to work out what it is. Quinces. A last ditch attempt to ripen them on a sunny windowsill has proven more successful than I ever could have hoped. I keep catching wafts of the most beautiful flowery notes. Did you know that Nigel Slater has *twenty three* pages on Quince in *Tender*? One of the recipes even states 'unripe quinces' which is a relief. Like tomatoes, there are always some that never make it past green.



28 SEPTEMBER

Village bartering. I swap three quinces, two kohlrabi and a pumpkin for a big bag of conference pears.

29 SEPTEMBER

There has been a storm. Although no rain came, the wind gusted through the oaks along the track and brought down branches. They crunch underfoot and I research dye recipes using acorns. I thought the roses were over but Mme Alfred Carriere continues to give generously. At the beginning of the year they are pure white with gorgeous reddish marking on the guard petals. The ones I cut today are distinctly blush pink in their tones. The scent remains wonderful.

30 SEPTEMBER

Did I ever mention? If you grow cosmos, you need three plants. Four max. Five if you are running an international cosmos farm. They are unbelievably prolific.

I know this and yet, every single season, in my enthusiasm to get going with spring, I forget. I have about thirty plants and therefore about a million flowers. If you are in Somerset and you need some cosmos in a hurry, call me.

