

The Autumn Garden: Your Essential October & November Guide

As peak growing season wraps up in the UK, October and November shift the focus from harvesting to bed preparation, bulb planting, and winter protection. Taking time now ensures robust root development before the heavy frosts hit and lays the groundwork for a lush, vibrant spring display.

What to Plant: Flowers, Bulbs & Vegetables

Autumn is the prime planting window in the UK. The soil retains summer heat while rainfall increases, giving new plants the ideal environment to establish deep root systems.

Spring Bulbs

- **October (Early Bulbs):** Plant **daffodils, crocuses, hyacinths, and alliums** in October while the soil is still warm. Plant bulbs at roughly **three times their depth** with the pointed end facing upwards.
- **November (Tulips):** Always wait until November to plant **tulip bulbs**. Cold autumn temperatures reduce the risk of *tulip fire* (*Botrytis tulipae*), a widespread fungal disease that thrives in warmer, damp soil.

Flowers & Bedding Plants

- **Winter & Spring Bedding:** Plant out **winter pansies, violas, polyanthus, and wallflowers (*Erysimum*)** in pots, borders, or window boxes to maintain colour through the darker months.
- **Bare-Root Perennials & Shrubs:** November is the start of the bare-root season. Plant dormant **roses, hedge plants (like hornbeam and beech), and hardy shrubs** while they are dormant; this is far more economical than buying pot-grown plants.

Vegetables & Herbs

- **Garlic & Autumn Onions:** Plant **garlic cloves and autumn onion sets** (such as *Senshyu*) in well-drained, weed-free soil.
- **Broad Beans:** Direct sow hardy varieties like '**Aquadulce Claudia**' in October or early November for an extra-early harvest next May.
- **Overwintering Crops:** Plant out **spring cabbage** transplants and sow **winter lettuce or corn salad** under fleece or in cloches.

Deadheading & Pruning: What to Cut Back (and What to Leave)

Regular deadheading diverts energy away from seed production and back into roots or new flower buds right up until the first heavy frosts.

What to Deadhead in Autumn

- **Dahlias & Chrysanthemums:** Continue snapping or clipping off faded flower heads right down to a main stem joint. Snip spent blooms off dahlias (oval/pointed buds are spent flowers; round buds are unopened flowers).
- **Roses:** Snip off fading blooms to prevent petals rotting on foliage, which can spread fungal spores like grey mould (*Botrytis*).
- **Winter Pansies & Violas:** Pinch out dead flowers along with their tiny stems to encourage continuous flowering through winter snaps.

What to Cut Back or Leave Intact

- **Shorten Tall Shrubs (Wind-Rock Protection):** Prune back **bush roses** and **buddleia** by roughly half in November. This prevents strong winter gales from loosening root systems in saturated ground (*wind-rock*).
- **Leave Seedheads for Wildlife:** Avoid cutting down perennials with sturdy stems or attractive seedheads like **echinacea, rudbeckia, sedum, and ornamental grasses**. They provide critical winter food for seed-eating birds like goldfinches and offer hibernation shelter for beneficial insects.

October: Bed Preparation & Moisture Control

1. Protecting Plants & Containers

- **Lifting Tender Bulbs:** After the first light frost turns foliage black, lift **dahlia tubers, begonias, and gladioli**. Brush off loose soil and store them in dry compost, sand, or newspaper in a frost-free shed or garage.
- **Container Care:** Raise outdoor pots onto **pot feet or bricks** to ensure heavy rainfall drains freely and prevents roots sitting in waterlogged compost, which leads to frost cracking.

2. Lawn Renovation & Soil Care

- **Last Mows & Aeration:** Set mower blades higher for the final cuts of the season. Spike compacted areas with a garden fork (*aeration*) to boost drainage before heavy autumn downpours start.
- **Applying Mulch:** Spread a generous 5–7cm layer of organic matter (well-rotted manure, garden compost, or leaf mould) over bare border soil. Soil organisms will pull it underground over winter, building soil structure effortlessly.

November: Winter Shielding & Equipment Maintenance

1. Greenhouse & Plant Protection

- **Insulation:** Fit bubble wrap on the inside of greenhouse glass to protect overwintering tender perennials (*pelargoniums, fuchsias*) and cut heating costs.
- **Fleece Wraps:** Wrap outdoor tender shrubs (like tree ferns, *cordylines*, or *banana plants*) in fleece or straw to shield their growing crowns from freezing snaps.

2. General Garden Hygiene

- **Clearing Fallen Leaves:** Rake leaves off lawns and pond netting promptly to prevent grass from rotting under dark, damp mats. Collect leaves into hessian sacks or wire bins to decompose into rich, crumbly *leaf mould*.
- **Tool Maintenance:** Clean, sharpen, and oil secateurs, shears, and spades. Drain garden hoses and outdoor taps to prevent frost damage to pipework.