

The Late Summer Garden: Your Guide to August & September

As the UK transitions from peak summer into the vital preparation period of autumn, your gardening tasks shift from active maintenance to strategic planning. This guide provides detailed instructions tailored for UK gardens to ensure your landscape remains healthy and your next season is even more successful.

August: The Month of Abundance

August in the UK is characterised by ripening harvests and potential heat stress. Maintenance is focused on preservation and productivity.

1. Strategic Watering for Heat Resistance

Small, exposed containers like hanging baskets are on "life support" during heatwaves, as compost can dry out completely in under two hours in direct midday sun.

- **The Weight Test:** Gently lift the base of your hanging baskets. If they feel weightless, they are dangerously dry. Move them to a shadier porch or north-facing wall to cut stress.
- **Timing and Technique:** Water deeply in the **early morning or evening** using stored rainwater or grey water where possible to reduce evaporation.
- **Quality over Quantity:** A thorough soak once or twice a week is far more effective than light daily sprinkles; it encourages **strong, deep roots** that can better cope with dry spells.

2. Precision Harvesting and Late Sowing

- **The Perfect Harvest:** Pick **courgettes** when they are 10–15cm long for the best flavour; leaving them too long causes the plant to stop producing. Harvest **Discovery apples** towards the third week of August if they come away with a gentle twist.
- **The "Last Call" Sowing:** Clear space from early potatoes or peas to sow **quick-maturing crops** like rocket, radishes, spring onions, and winter lettuce.
- **Seed Saving Excellence:** On dry days, collect ripe seeds (indicated by a change from green to brown/black). Extract seeds from pods, clean off any "chaff" to prevent rot, and store in labelled paper envelopes in a refrigerator at **5°C** to maintain viability for years.

3. Summer Pruning Techniques

- **Trained Fruit Trees:** For espaliers, cordons, or fans, cut back new side shoots (laterals) longer than 20cm to **three leaves above the basal cluster**.

Do not prune shoots shorter than this, as they often carry next year's fruit buds.

- **Wisteria Management:** To keep growth tidy and prepare for winter, cut back long, whippy shoots to **5–6 buds** from the main stem.
- **Soft Fruit Care:** Cut out the old, fruited canes of summer raspberries at ground level and tie in the new green shoots for next year's crop.

September: Strategic Preparation

September is the turning point where the focus moves to winter protection and the spring of next year.

1. Greenhouse and Cold Frame Health

- **Maximising Autumn Light:** By late September, light levels drop significantly. **Remove all shading paint** and wash the glass and frame with warm soapy water to remove algae and grime.
- **Nighttime Care:** As night temperatures fall, ensure you **close greenhouse doors and vents** at sunset to trap residual warmth.
- **Overwintering and Cuttings:** Bring tender plants like **fuchsias and pelargoniums** inside before the first frosts. This is also the ideal time to take cuttings to ensure a fresh supply of plants for next year.

2. Planting for the Future

- **Spring Bulb Rules:** Plant **daffodils, crocuses, and hyacinths** now while the soil is warm enough for roots to establish. As a rule, plant bulbs at **three times their own depth**. **Wait until November** to plant tulips to avoid the fungal disease "tulip fire".
- **The Art of Division:** Refresh hardy perennials like hostas, daylilies, and hardy geraniums every 2–3 years. **Water the plant well the day before**. For fleshy roots (like Daylilies), use two garden forks pushed back-to-back into the centre to lever the clump apart.
- **Autumn Kitchen Garden:** Mid-September is the time to plant **autumn onion sets and garlic** for an early harvest next summer.

3. Professional Lawn Rejuvenation

- **Scarifying and Aerating:** Use a spring-tine rake to remove thatch (scarify) and a garden fork to spike the ground at regular intervals (aerate). This relieves compaction and allows **water and oxygen** to reach the roots.
- **Repairing Patches:** Fill in bare spots by reseeding while the soil is still moist and warm. If your grass is yellowing, a light application of pelleted chicken manure can help, but use it sparingly.
- **Download my detailed guide to lawn care.**

Organic Pest & Disease Control

Orchard Hygiene: Regularly remove any fruit showing **brown rot**. Do not leave it on the ground or put it in your home compost, as spores will spread to healthy fruit; instead, destroy the infected material.

- **Targeted Slug Control:** If using beer traps, use a saucer with **raised edges**; this prevents helpful ground beetles from falling in and drowning while still trapping slugs.
- **Vine Weevil Defence:** Check container plants for wilting. You can trap adult beetles on warm August nights. For protection, wrap **PVC tape** around the outside of pots and smear it with insect barrier glue that the weevils cannot cross.
- **Greenhouse Ants:** Prevent ants from "farming" aphids on your greenhouse plants by **greasing the legs of your staging** or standing them in small moats of water.

Expert Diary Tip: September is an ideal time to start thinking about a more sustainable water management setup. Soaker irrigation systems for when there isn't a hose pipe ban. Also worth thinking about having additional water butts installed to harvest all that rain we will get over the colder months.