

Grow North Training notes – September

In September, you will notice that many of your crops are completing their lifecycle. There is lots to harvest, enjoy eating and storing. However, there are still plenty of jobs in the garden looking after winter crops, and thinking ahead to the following spring. If you haven't sown seeds for some overwinter crops, you may wish to think about buying in some pre-grown small plants whether from a garden centre or from a mail order company.

Sowing now:

- Spring lettuce
- Winter spinach
- Oriental leaves
- Pak choi
- Salad leaves
- Turnips
- Hardy green manures

Planting now:

- Spring cabbage
- Autumn onion sets

September Garden Tasks:

- Pick apples, plums and pears if you have them. Pick apples and pears by cupping in your hand and gently twisting. If the fruit comes away easily, it is ripe; if not leave it for a few days before trying again. Always handle any fruit very carefully to avoid bruising and it is important to try and retain the stalk on all tree fruit as this helps to prolong the life in storage. Look out for wasps when picking plums, as at this time of year they are looking for sweet foods, and will be drawn to ripe plums on the tree. You may wish to investigate wasp traps around your fruit trees, if you are worried about being stung. But do remember, that wasps are not all bad as they eat insects and will help out with eating caterpillars from your cabbages.
- Autumn-ripening varieties of raspberry such as 'Allgold' and 'Autumn Bliss' will be ready to harvest now. These can keep producing fruit right up until the first frosts of the year.
- This is a good time to pot up some herbs for autumn and winter, either using new plants from your local garden centre, seeds or by lifting plants from the garden. It is also still possible to take cuttings of some woody herbs such as sage which should just have time to root and establish. Chives and mint can be lifted and potted for growing in a cold greenhouse where the additional shelter will keep them going for a little longer than they would outside in the elements.
- While the bulk of sowing is over for this season, there are a few things that can be started now to provide some variety during the winter months and into the spring. One of these is winter spinach, a nutritious and easy to grow crop. Simply sow direct into the ground in a sunny, sheltered spot or sow into cell trays for planting out when the young plants are well established.
- Look out for Autumn onion sets in garden centres, or order them in. These can be planted now giving them plenty of time to establish before the onset of winter. Bulbs such as this may not seem to be growing once planted, but although little top growth will appear this year, the roots will be very active, enjoying the remaining warmth in the soil to

establish before the winter freeze. Your bulbs should be ready to harvest in June or July next year.

- If your compost containers are filling up, it may be a good time to harvest your compost, and turn over compost that still needs to be left composting for longer. You can add your completed compost to any beds that you have just cleared, to improve the soil ready for the next crop.
- Keep feeding the tomatoes, peppers, aubergine and cucumbers will continue to need feeding, the rule being not to stop until the fruit has ceased to develop. Outdoor tomatoes and cucumbers will benefit from shelter unless the weather is exceptionally nice. Remove the growing point from outdoor tomatoes to encourage the existing trusses to ripen, since it is unlikely that there will be time for plants to form many more fruits before falling light levels slow growth too much.
- Harvest your potatoes. Once the potato crop is cleared, leave for a few days then fork over the top 20cm, which will reward you with potatoes that you will be amazed you missed when you harvested. Leave them out to dry before storing (do this indoors if the weather remains wet) and store only undamaged ones in a dark frost-free place, in paper sacks tied at the neck. There is no hurry to reduce the temperature of potatoes immediately after harvest. Temperatures between 10-15 °C promote the development of a layer of protective corky tissue on the skin, and the healing of any minor wounds. After 2-3 weeks move them to a cooler spot, storing them in the dark, at temperatures between 5-10 °C
- Keep picking runner beans, French beans, courgettes and cucumbers regularly to prolong the harvest period up to the first frosts. When your peas are finished, compost the foliage of the peas but leave the roots in the ground as the nodules on them contain valuable nitrogen.
- The last of the onions should be drying now. Once harvested you need to ensure they have dried off to prevent rot in storage. They do best on a rack outdoors allowing air to blow through but you need to keep the rain off in some way without laying sheeting directly on them.
- Small leeks may well be ready to pull in September. Pull alternates from the row, allowing more space around those left to go through the winter.
- Begin lifting root vegetables for storage such as carrots, beetroots and turnips. Parsnips are better left in the ground, as they taste better after the first frosts. To store the root crops, choose only undamaged roots, twist or cut off the foliage and store in boxes between layers of sand or old potting compost.

References

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http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/todo_now/veg_gard_now.php