

Grow North November Training Notes

It's noticeably colder now in the garden, and it is normal to have had frosts already by now. There is less daylight, so you will probably find less time to go out in to the garden and perhaps less inclination with the cold, but there are some worthwhile tasks ranging from planting up some overwinter crops, to tidying up so that your garden is ready to go come the Spring, pruning your fruit trees, bushes and canes and improving and protecting your soil. Think ahead to next year and start to make your plans. You should also keep a check on your current overwinter crops and be on the look out for pests and disease, or if extra support or protection would be required. You may also wish to think about seeds, plants, fruit trees or bushes and any equipment that you may wish to order. It is a good time to reflect about what has gone well in the garden and what hasn't worked so well so that you can aim to improve for the next growing year.

Things to do in the vegetable garden this month

- Consider lifting root crops or give them protection from frost if you have decided to leave them in the ground, with straw or bracken, hedge prunings, or horticultural fleece.
- Protect cauliflower curds by folding over and / or tying the leaves. Exposure to sunlight discolours the cauliflower curd and can produce off-flavours. This will protect the cauliflower and keep the cauliflowers a nice creamy white.
- Early Brussels sprouts will be ready for picking now. Remember that you can cut the small 'cabbage' from the top of each plant and eat it too. You may need to net the plants against pigeons if you haven't already done so. Pigeons become an increasing problem as the weather gets colder.
- Finish clearing crop remains and compost them. Most material is fine to compost but do not compost diseased plant material such as onions with white rot or brassicas with club root. Add it to your green waste for collection or take to your local Recycling Centre, where the waste is taken away to be composted at higher temperatures than can be reached by composting at home.
- Check stored crops, potatoes in particular, for signs of disease. Dispose of any showing signs of rot so it doesn't get a chance to spread.
- Put out food for birds; they will reward you by eating pests such as aphids, caterpillars, slugs and snails.
- Clean pots and seed trays now to make the spring rush less frantic.
- Remove any last traces of crops from the greenhouse and clean the glass, staging and floor using a garden disinfectant.
- Make sure that bare ground is covered. Autumn leaves or seaweed make a good winter mulch spread over the soil protecting it from heavy rainfall.
- Prune indoor vines after the leaves have fallen, and burn the old leaves to reduce disease. Ventilate well and keep the greenhouse cold. If there are no plants inside that could suffer, leave it open for a couple of months.
- Tend to brassicas - first clear away any yellowing or fallen leaves as these harbour diseases and act as a hiding place for slugs and other pests. Remove weeds at the same time. Next, check over the leaves, squashing or rubbing off as many leaf pests such as aphids or whitefly as possible. Spray bad infestations if necessary. Then stake any tall or top heavy plants – kale, broccoli and sprouts are the most vulnerable – to prevent root damage caused by wind rock and finally take precautions against slugs and snails using your favoured form of control (traps, barriers or pellets) and of course where birds are a problem, cover the rows with netting or erect bird scarers.
- Order your soft and tree fruit as soon as possible to ensure you get the varieties you want.

- Plant out winter lettuce, rhubarb crowns, onion sets and spring cabbages.
- Check and repair fences, especially rabbit proofing if rabbits are a problem in your area. The netting should be buried at least 15cm (6in) under the ground in an 'L' shape to prevent rabbits digging underneath. Repair fences and broken posts before winter gales blow them over. Wooden posts are less likely to rot at the base if they are not concreted into the ground. Drive the metal spike-type post-holders into the ground and slot the posts into them.

Sowing and Planting

Carry on sowing and planting for winter cropping such as winter salads, and for early harvests next season. Use cloches, cold frames, greenhouses and polytunnels to maintain growth over winter.

Garlic

Plant in November - the sooner the better for the best crop. It is preferable to plant named varieties of garlic, such as *Thermidrome* and *Printanor*, rather than using left-over cloves from garlic bought from the greengrocer. This will avoid the risk of introducing disease, and help ensure you are growing a variety suited to the UK. Some varieties of garlic, such as *Printanor*, can also be planted in early spring, but will give much better yields if it goes through a cold period over winter. Plant 7 inches apart.

Broad beans

Broad beans are traditionally sown in autumn (late October to early December) for an early summer crop. Autumn sown plants are also less attractive to blackfly, but their success can be variable; mice and wet conditions can cut plant numbers considerably.

You can either sow direct to the ground, or in the greenhouse or polytunnel. If opting for indoor sowing, consider using deep cell trays (Rootrainers) or toilet roll inner cardboard tubes. If sowing outside, make sure that the soil is well prepared, and is not too exposed, windswept or the soil very heavy. For outdoors growing, it is a good idea to cover the rows with cloches to keep off the worst of the winter weather. Sow in double rows with 15-20cm (6-8in) between rows and the same distance between seeds in the row. If sowing on raised beds single rows with seeds spaced at 15cm (6in) intervals is fine. Dress soil with a potash fertiliser if chocolate spot disease is a regular problem.

Use extra hardy cultivars such as *Super Aquadulce*, *Aquadulce Claudia*, *Imperial Green Longpod*, or *The Sutton* (a bush variety good for small gardens under a cloche). If autumn sown crops tend to fail in your garden, don't despair; some of the spring sown cultivars can produce a crop that is almost as early.

Hardy peas

Round seeded, hardy peas can be sown now for a June crop – this is particularly effective if you plant in a polytunnel. Suitable varieties include *Douce Provence*, *Feltham First*, *Meteor* and *Pilot*. They can also be sown in the spring. Pea seeds are a favourite with mice, so it is not worth sowing them now where mice are a problem.

Hardwood Cuttings of Black currant and Gooseberry

While pruning your currants and gooseberries, take some hardwood cuttings. Take cuttings from healthy bushes only – ignore bushes with any signs of disease. Select a healthy looking stem of ripened (brown not green wood) and cut a 25 cm length. The cut should be made just below a bud. Pull off all the leaves from the stem being careful not to remove the stem.

The first year with your hardwood cuttings can be regarded as being like a nursery year - where the hardwood cuttings can develop their root ball. If you were doing a large quantity, you could fit lots and lots of cuttings in a trench, and then dig them up and space them out a bit more at the end of the year. If you have fewer cuttings, you could either put in where you would like to have them ultimately, or they would also be fine in pots for this year. When you plant them, make sure that at least 7.5 cm above the ground.

Make your own Leafmould

Autumn leaves rot down to make leafmould - a pleasant, dark brown, crumbly material. Leafmould is a good soil improver, lawn conditioner and mulch. It can be used in seed and potting mixes too.

Leafmold is easy to make, is free and saves using peat-based products. It is good for the soil, and cuts down on the need for watering. Use leaves that fall in the autumn. They will be brown and look dead, and avoid evergreen leaves such as holly, laurel or Leyland cypress and other conifers. Autumn leaves are rotted down mainly by the slow, cool action of fungi - rather than the quicker acting bacteria that are responsible for composting. This is why autumn leaves in quantity are best recycled separately in a leafmould heap. Small quantities of dry autumn leaves could be added to your compost heap, to provide a balance to compliment your kitchen waste.

Collect fallen leaves from your garden, and from pavements and verges of quiet streets. If you have a dog or are collecting leaves from a public place it may be a good idea to wear gloves in case there may be concealed dog poo amongst the leaves. Don't disturb drifts of autumn leaves under hedges and other out of the way areas. They may be used as hibernating sites by hedgehogs and other creatures. Leaves can be gathered up by hand, using a lawn rake. If you wished to speed up the decay, you could consider placing the leaves in a bin and shredding with a strimmer.

Leave the leaves in a suitable container – whether this is black plastic sacks or a mesh / netting container that you can make yourself. You will need to leave the leafmold for a year or two, and then it will be ready to use when it is well rotten and crumbly. You can use the leafmold when it is still young as a mulch, winter cover for bare soil or as a soil improver. When it is fully matured options for use include creating seed-sowing mix (mixed with equal parts sharp sand and garden compost) or potting compost (mixed with equal parts sharp sand, loam and garden compost).

For a more developed plant, the spacing is 1.5 - 1.8 meters apart, so that would be for next year. If you made any hardwood cuttings of currants and gooseberries taken last autumn can be transplanted into their final positions, after thorough enrichment of the soil in the planting hole. They like a good feed - so some well rotted manure would keep them happy.

Pest & disease watch

- Brassica whitefly can be a major problem winter brassica crops - Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, kale etc. Where infestations are severe, a couple of sprays of insecticidal soap may be necessary. Pick off any yellowing lower leaves before you spray, which is where most of the young whitefly scales will be found. Remember to

spray under the leaves too. Insecticidal soap must come into contact with the pest in order to be effective.

- Net Brussels, broccoli and other winter brassicas to protect them from pigeon damage. Secure the base to prevent any birds getting caught up in the netting. Support the nets above the plant tops so that pigeons don't just land and eat the leaves through the netting.
- Leek rust - a fungal disease of leeks. Red/orange pustules develop on the leaves and stems. Sheltered sites, poor drainage and planting too close together can exacerbate this problem. Cold weather can halt the progress of this disease. In a mild autumn the disease may continue to develop, turning leaves yellow and resulting in reduction of plant size.

Review your growing year so far

As you think about ordering seeds, plants, fruit trees and bushes or equipment it is a good chance to reflect on how things have gone in the garden so far. Here are some questions you can ask yourself.

1. Did you have a good garden site? Did you get enough sunlight? How was your drainage?
2. Was the garden large enough, or was it too large or too small?
3. Were the vegetables you planted worth the space they used up, or the time you spent on them?
4. Were there any vegetables that you did not like to grow or eat?
5. Were there any varieties that did better than others?
6. Could you have planted more of certain vegetables?
7. Did you plant too much of any crop?
8. Did you plant the vegetables varieties at the right times? Too early? Too late?
9. Did you have problems with insects or pests? Which vegetables were affected?
10. Did you have any disease problems? With what vegetables?
11. Did you have all the tools that you needed? Are they still in good shape?
12. If you tried some new techniques such as mulching, how did it work out?
13. Did you have as much fun as you thought you would gardening?

Keeping a record of your gardening can be a very useful activity, and if you find that something seemed to be planted out too early or too late, noting down when you did will help you decide when to plant in following years. If you haven't already kept a note or journal of your gardening tasks, consider starting one. It can be useful to note down first frosts of the autumn and winter and also the late frosts in the spring, so you can build up a picture of what to expect in your garden.

References

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