

Gardening tips for October

The summer has been a dry one. I know it seemed to rain every day in August. It didn't. In fact, we had the second driest August since 2013 and so far in September no rain, last year's September had an above average 98 mm. I think the only normal feature of our weather is that it seems abnormal to us humans but the plants seem able to cope and this year looks like it could be an early autumn as leaves are already falling partly due to the weather as much as the time of year. And before anyone refers to an "Indian Summer" please look back to last October's article.

The Veg Patch

Is your rhubarb going limp in the summer sunshine? If so, it's time to dig it up, divide and replant in some suitably fortified compost mix. October is the earliest time to consider splitting rhubarb, it can be done any time through the winter months but if done in October as soon as the plant is dormant, when ground isn't waterlogged, there should be enough time for its roots to get established before the winter sets in. Rhubarb isn't a fussy plant, our clay soil is fine but can be improved with chicken manure, adding a loam-based soil or garden compost, add as much organic matter as you can as this will aid water retention, rhubarb is a very thirsty plant. When dividing a rhubarb crown, make sure that each part of the divided rhizome has at least one growing bud or crown and when replanting keep this above ground level to prevent contact with the soil. Water in and then water again, and again and again. Don't worry if we have a cold and frosty winter, rhubarb enjoys a frost more than we do.

If rhubarb isn't your thing, what about broad bean. Early varieties can be sown directly into prepared ground this month and give you an early crop just in time for next year's gardening association summer show. The same can be done for hardy overwintering pea varieties. If in doubt, garden centres will be full of suitable veg to plant now for an early crop next spring.

The Flower Garden

It's that time of year again when the great tidy up begins. Start cutting back on growth than is dying back and if not too woody, compost it, otherwise use the acorn bin.

What about your hydrangeas? Have they been wilting in the summer heat? If so, now is the time to think about replanting. Hydrangeas do best in moist

soil, so avoid the sunniest south facing parts of the garden. Plant with plenty of moisture-retaining organic matter such as well rotted manure and water in well making sure the 'crown' is level with the soil surface. Mulch after planting, ideally with leaf mould; alternatively use well-rotted manure or compost. Don't be tempted to prune until the spring, the dead flow heads can protect the stems from frost.

The Water Garden

Leaves, leaves and more leaves, do whatever necessary to keep them out of the water even if it means extra pocket money for the kids (parental guidance recommended). Rotting leaves in ponds gives algae just what they need to turn the water green next spring. There will be a layer of sludge at the bottom of the pond made up from fish waste and decaying plant matter. Scoop it out and discard after checking for wildlife which should be returned to the pond. Also, clean pump filters if present.

Lawns

Remove leaves and if you have space keep them in a head to produce leaf mould, a useful soil conditioner, just use the crumbly leaf mould as a mulch. Keep cutting the grass if still growing but aim to leave about 50 mm in height to help it through the winter.

For membership details and to ask garden related questions please go to our website www.gardenreg.org.

Keep gardening.

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