

Gardening tips for September

It's September, where did summer go? Was there one? Winter the spring seemed to finish around the end of June then there were a couple of hot sunny days in July and the odd day in August. I'm always hopeful for decent weather in autumn, perhaps it will coincide with the EGRGA Autumn Show incorporating the Ellens Green Art Group's Art Exhibition on 14th September, (see page xx for details).

I've put that gardening bot (now calling itself Asia!) back in its shed for another year, we will see what nonsense it comes up with again next August!

Now the autumn has arrived it must be time for a project. Scarifying the lawn is an easy way to fill the Acorn Bin or Brown-Top Bin for Garden Waste to use its new snappier title. Or how about making some raised beds?

There is a bit of history around raised beds, some say they were invented by British Rail as a way of selling off all their tatty used and unwanted railway sleeper. Others suggest it was down to Parisian market gardeners of the 18th Century building up their plots using the plentiful supply of horse manure from the city streets. Stone walls were then needed to contain the vast heaps and *voilà, le lit de jardin surélevé!*



However they came into being, why should you bother when you could enjoy *un paresseux a après-midi dans le jardin à boire du champagne.*

Before getting started, is a raised bed necessary or is an edge all that is needed. I've seen raised beds being used without much filling, perhaps to owner realised how much they cost to fill, so only go as high as necessary. Good clean edged do look good in the garden and may be all that's necessary without the effort and expense of raising anything. So, why bother – this really comes down to what you will be using them for. They can be structural and especially useful on a sloping surface where the raised bed can be used for levelling an area of garden. Depending on how much slope is involved there may be a need for more than one bed to produce a terraced effect. If the material used is big enough it can double up as garden seating, for this to be comfortable it need to be at least 20 cm deep and about 50 cm high. Accessibility is a good reason to opt for the raised bed, less bending down to do the weeding but whatever the reason keep the width to no more than 1.5m

so its centre can be easily reached from both sides without the need to walk on it.

If the garden has poor soil, using a raised bed and filling the space with a suitable soil/compost/sand and gravel mix is a means to growing plants of preference. The infill can be mixed to suit acid loving plants such as cucumbers, tomatoes, sage, rosemary, blueberries, blackcurrants, heathers, camelias, begonias, daffodils &c. If the preference is for alkaline loving plants, then consider planting cucumbers (they're not fussy), kale, cabbage, thyme, oregano, lavender, begonia, geraniums.

Now the decision is made to raise the bed, how high and what with? Of all the products available to make raised beds, having straight lines is the simplest approach. Using sleepers (the old oily tar-stained offerings from British Rail are very messy and superseded mostly by purpose manufactured pressure treated "sleepers" available from builders' merchants and garden centres) is an easy approach. Alternatives include brick, block or stone, metal and plastic, the plastic versions more suited to lawn edging. Remember, the higher the bed the more it will cost to fill. And the advantages,

- Once made they are easy to maintain and should last for many years.
- Enable those less physically able to continue growing when they are not up to digging over large plots.
- Yield per square meter is higher but the space taken up by paths means that total yield is generally equal to ordinary growing methods.
- Closer planting therefore less weeds.
- Easier to keep in order as you can select and clear a bed at a time rather than coping with the whole garden.
- Can be ideal for purpose made large cloches and fleece supports.
- Enable high quality areas of deep topsoil if your soil is poor but are a lot of cost and effort if you have a good quality soil to start with.
- Raised beds can raise the soil level if you suffer with water logging but they will need watering in dry weather.
- Attractive and enhance a garden.

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