



THE AMATEUR GARDENER

by Vanda Lawrence

Climbing roses should be pruned once they have finished flowering and any new growth should be tied in. Also, finish pruning your raspberry canes if you haven't already done so. As I write this in mid-September our yellow raspberries are still fruiting – they've been lovely this year.

I've already mentioned bees this month – do please consider them whenever you buy any new plants for the garden – but now I will remind you about the birds. We can't do without the birds and the bees can we? 😊 Seriously, they need us to remember to put out food for them in the winter, also water, especially in frosty weather. If your bird bath is anything like mine it gets quite mucky so I clean it with baking powder rather than using any toxic chemicals. I tip out any water, cover the surface with baking powder and leave for a couple of minutes before wiping clean and rinsing. Simple. Also, did you know that if you add a small amount of baking powder to the water in a vase, your cut flowers will last longer.

As you finish cropping in the vegetable garden, any areas which are going to stay empty over the winter will benefit from a feed. Just roughly dig over and add compost as you do so, leaving it for the winter weather to break down. Also, now is the time to plant up your favourite herbs into pots to have near the back door or on the kitchen windowsill, ready to use during the winter months.



Christmas Rose@Wikimedia Commons/3268zauber

Now is also the time for chestnuts to start falling from the trees. We had a chestnut tree in our garden in England and personally I love them roasted, but I have wondered what else you can do with them so I 'googled' it (as you do these days). Goodness me! So many recipes to choose from, although often they needed chestnut purée; so OK, I 'googled' that too and here is what I came up with from www.close-cooking.com

- 12 chestnuts, boiled and peeled
- half cup of milk
- half cup of water

Place everything in a saucepan making sure you have enough liquid to cover the chestnuts. Simmer 10-20 minutes, until chestnuts are soft. Remove chestnuts, reserving liquid. Purée the chestnuts using as much of the liquid as necessary.

Now how easy is that? And it makes a change from digging doesn't it? Happy October everyone (and don't forget to put the clocks back on Sunday 25th).

October and November are ideal months for planting new trees, shrubs and perennials because the weather is not too hot and dry yet the soil still has some warmth left in it to encourage new roots to settle in. So make time to wander around your garden to decide what you would like to plant and where. Then look again to see where the sun is shining and where the cold, draughty spots are in the garden – no point in planting a sun-lover in a cold spot is there? Usually you can make adjustments and protect against the elements but it's as well to be aware of these things, especially if you have just taken on a new house and garden.

Make the most of the dry days to cut back or lift and divide your perennials, also remove summer bedding in readiness for winter and spring flowering plants and bulbs. Don't be tempted to manure these beds or borders at this time of the year, you will only encourage new, soft growth which will be damaged by the cold weather. Instead, add bone-meal, a slow-release fertilizer, which will give the plants a good start in the spring.

When bees emerge from hibernation at the end of winter they will need plenty of flowering plants to work on so 'think bee' when choosing your winter/spring bedding. *Helleborus niger* 'Christmas Rose' flowers during the winter and into spring so is great for them, as are Pulmonaria, Snowdrops, Crocuses, Wallflowers, Mahonia, Sarcococca and Honeysuckle.

Lawns will benefit from some care and attention now, so scarify, aerate and feed with autumn fertilizer. Reseed any worn patches too, while the soil is warm.

Dahlias are still giving us a good show as I write this, but we shall have frosty weather in due course. As soon as the top growth has been blackened by frost you can cut them down to about 6" and then lift carefully with a fork. Stand the tubers upside-down in a frost-free place to dry out then store crown-uppermost in boxes of very slightly damp peat. Keep crowns above the peat, dust with flowers of sulphur and store in a frost-free shed or greenhouse for the winter. I think my French neighbour leaves his dahlias in the ground over winter, so I am going to try it, simply because I am short of storage space because of garden produce, so fingers crossed and watch this space!!



Sweet Chestnut@Wikimedia Commons/Rob Young