

Autumn Gardening Corner



Garden Expert Dr Jane Explains...

As autumn advances we enjoy the changing colours of the leaves whilst we batten down the hatches in readiness for the winter. Have you ever wondered why leaves change colour in autumn?

In autumn, temperatures fall and the days grow shorter, which causes the leaves of deciduous trees and shrubs to die and fall. During this time leaves change colour from green to dazzling shades of orange, yellow and red. Their cells deteriorate and the green pigment, chlorophyll, breaks down, and importantly the nutrients are salvaged and moved to other parts of the plant.

Finally the layer of cells that connect the leaf to the stem dies and the leaf falls off. This process allows deciduous plants to survive the cold, harsh winter months – new leaves grow in spring.

Garden jobs for autumn:

Autumn is a busy time in the garden!

- Dig over the veg patch and incorporate well-rotted organic matter.
- Plant spring cabbages, onion sets (mini onion bulbs) and hardy herbs such as mint, rosemary, sage and thyme. Sow

seeds of winter salad leaves, radish and spinach. Plant bare-rooted trees and shrubs. Also, plant bulbs like lilies, daffodils, tulips, snowdrops and crocus. Plant up winter tubs with bulbs, pretty cyclamen and cheerful pansies.

- Tidy up, divide and plant herbaceous perennials.
- Shorten the branches of large shrubs like Buddleja, tall or climbing roses, and tall cotoneasters by about one third to reduce wind damage. Leave branches with berries for the birds. Give hedges their final trim.
- Take hardwood cuttings from shrubs (e.g. Buddleja, Cornus, Ribes, Cotoneaster, Lonicera).
- Clear away summer annuals and bedding.
- Make sure all tender plants are protected – move them into the greenhouse, conservatory, well-lit shed or garage, or even a cool bedroom. Larger plants can be protected outdoors by wrapping in horticultural fleece or bubble wrap supported by canes.
- Early autumn is the ideal time to be dealing with moss and applying an autumn lawn feed (make sure that you read the manufacturer's instructions carefully before application). Raise the height of the blade when mowing in autumn. Early autumn is also the best time to lay new lawns.
- Clear up and compost fallen leaves.
- ...and finally, when the sun shines make time to simply enjoy the gorgeous autumn colours of the leaves, fruits and berries.