

Jobs for September

If August was all about harvesting, then September is more about tidying and composting. As soon as you finish harvesting, clear away old foliage and vegetation and put it straight on to your compost heap. Don't leave it to rot on the soil, where it may spread disease. Even this late in the season weeds will still be growing, especially on areas of your plot that you've just cleared of crops. Sowing green manure is one way of keeping them down.



Vine tomatoes will finish ripening if untied and laid flat on a bed of straw. Cover with a tunnel cloche to speed up the process.

Water when necessary

September can be dry, particularly in a warm Indian summer. If rainfall is scarce and temperatures remain high, continue to water all crops regularly.

Sow green manures

If you haven't already done so, field beans, annual ryegrass, and phacelia can be sown in September. They will overwinter and can be dug into the ground next spring (see p.147).

Turn your compost heap

As you add this autumn's mass of dead and dying plant material to your heap, turn it regularly with a fork to aerate it and stimulate decomposition. Water it if it's dry, and cover to keep it warm.

Harvest any remaining onions

Lift any onions that are still in the ground, and dry them thoroughly before storing them.

Ripen and pick tomatoes

To prompt tomatoes to fatten up and ripen, cut off all the lower leaves (especially if they are turning yellow). Cover bush tomatoes with fleece or a cloche. Untie vine tomatoes from their canes, carefully bend them over, and lay them flat on a layer of clean straw. Pick all remaining green tomatoes by the end of the month and finish ripening them indoors.

Cut down asparagus

Tall, feathery asparagus foliage will be starting to turn yellow now and should be cut right down to just 2.5cm (1in) above the ground.

Earth up or stake Brussels sprouts

As Brussels sprouts and other autumn and winter brassicas grow steadily taller they

may become top-heavy and require supporting. Earth up the stems or tie them in to stakes.

Ripen pumpkins and winter squashes

Remove a few leaves so that the sun can get to the fruits. Continue watering and feeding until you're ready to harvest, this month or next.

Feed and trim celeriac

Feed regularly with liquid manure and remove any old, damaged leaves from around the stem.

Harvest apples and pears

Continue testing for ripeness and pick when the moment is right. Early pears can be picked while still slightly firm, then ripened indoors. Eat early season fruit straight away, and store mid- and late-season varieties.

(below, left to right) **Cut asparagus** stems and their ferny foliage right down, then compost. **Expose squash** to sunlight by removing a few leaves to encourage ripening. **Old or damaged celeriac** leaves can be pulled from the base to expose the swelling crowns.

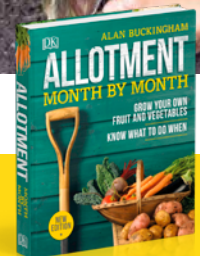


HARVESTING SWEETCORN

Cobs are usually ready for picking when the silks at the top turn brown or black. Pick cobs just before you need them as the sweet flavour deteriorates with storage.

1 Test for ripeness and ensure sweetcorn is at its most succulent by peeling back the outer leaves and digging a fingernail into one of the kernels. Ripe corn exudes a milky, not clear, juice.

2 Harvest cobs from the plant by gripping them firmly and pulling them downwards, while holding the main stem steady with your other hand. Ripe cobs should snap off fairly easily.



Dig up most if not all of your potatoes by the end of this month. Although leaving them in the ground longer will result in larger tubers, there is a greater risk of attack by slugs. Dry them out, remove any damaged tubers, and store in lightproof potato sacks.

1 As potato haulms (stems and leaves) die down, cut them off with a sharp knife to leave about 5cm (2in) of stem on each plant.

2 Wait for a dry day to lift your crop so the potatoes will be easier to uproot and store.

3 When digging up potatoes, you never know how many or how few you're going to find underneath. The stems above ground give absolutely no indication.



Prune blackberry

canes that have borne fruit this year and take out any old or dead wood. Leave new canes unpruned to carry next year's crop.



Prune blackberries and hybrid berries

As soon as you have finished picking, cut out all the old canes that carried this year's fruit. New, non-fruiting canes should be tied in to take their place, ready for next year.

Order new fruit trees and bushes

November is the best month for planting many new, bare-root trees and bushes, so it's worth ordering the plants from specialist nurseries this month for the widest choice.

Collect and save seeds

It's worth saving certain seeds for sowing next year – especially plants you're fond of and that may be hard to find commercially. Bean, pea, squash, pumpkin, melon, and tomato seeds can all be saved, dried, stored, and sown again – although not F1 hybrid varieties. It's difficult to predict how these seeds will turn out.

September pests & diseases

Vegetables

■ **Check potatoes** for blight, particularly in wet or humid weather. If you spot diseased foliage, cut the haulms right down immediately and destroy them. Do not compost them. Lift potatoes at once in case they are still edible.

■ **Carrot flies** are still laying eggs this month. When they hatch the maggots can attack late crops. Protect plants with fleece or physical barriers.

■ **Powdery mildews** may affect peas, courgettes, squashes, and outdoor cucumbers. Water regularly, and remove and destroy any leaves that show signs of infection.

■ **Check tomatoes** for signs of blight. In warm, wet weather an attack can kill off a whole crop very quickly and infected crops must be destroyed. Traditional copper-based fungicides, such as Bordeaux mixture, are no longer permitted for use by home growers.

■ **Cabbage whiteflies** can continue to infest brassicas through the autumn and into winter. If there are only a few, pick them off and squash them. Otherwise, spray under the leaves.

■ **Leek moth caterpillars** feed on the leaves of leeks and burrow into the stems. Pick them off as soon as you see them.

■ **Slugs and snails** still need controlling, especially in wet weather when the ground is damp.

Fruit

■ **Look for brown rot** on apples, pears, plums, and quinces. Remove and destroy infected fruits. A few healthy windfalls can be left as bait to attract wasps.

■ **Apple bitter pit** is caused by calcium deficiency. Watering regularly and spraying with calcium nitrate solution may help.

■ **Remove apples and pears** affected by scab and collect up any infected leaves. Destroy them rather than composting them.

■ **Check apples and pears** for signs of canker (see p.327). Immediately prune out and destroy all infected wood. Sterilize any tools you've used. Do not use traditional copper-based fungicides, such as Bordeaux mixture (see above).

■ **Prune out mildewed foliage** on apples, pears, and gooseberries and destroy it.

■ **Do not prune cherries or plums** now or at any time until next spring, as pruning cuts may allow silver leaf fungus to enter.



(clockwise from top left) **Potato blight** is a fungal infection that begins on the leaves. **Tomato blight** destroys leaves and eventually causes fruit to rot. **Leek moth caterpillars** in cocoons will pupate. Pick them off. **Scab** on apples can be due to damp conditions and overcrowded branches. **Brown rot** is a fungus, often spread by birds and insects. **Cabbage whiteflies** do not pose a serious problem unless plants become heavily infested.

