

LATE AUTUMN TO WINTER

Although flowers can be scarce in the garden over the winter months, berries, evergreen foliage, and trees with decorative bark will cheer up the garden and add interest. Take stock of the gardening year as it ends, and use the time to begin planning your spring displays.

► BRING HERBS INDOORS

Most container herb plants are too delicate to survive the winter outdoors, so bring them under cover in their pots for the colder months before temperatures begin to drop. This will ensure a steady supply to liven up your winter dishes when other produce is thin on the ground. Position pots on a windowsill to catch as much winter sunshine as possible, and pinch out growing tips when necessary to promote a bushy habit.



◀ WINTER-PRUNE SHRUBS

February is the month to prune many woody plants, including winter-flowering shrubs such as *Hamamelis*, once their flowers have faded. Summer-flowering shrubs, such as the butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*), that flower on new wood later in the summer can be cut right back, using loppers if necessary. The twiggy prunings can be used as plant supports elsewhere in the garden, or shredded to be added to the compost heap or to make a mulch that can be applied in spring when the ground is a little warmer.



◀ FEED THE BIRDS

Food for birds is in short supply over the colder months, so put food out for them on a regular basis; different mixes are available for feeders and for bird tables and ground feeding. Clean out bird boxes of old nesting material to encourage birds to nest in them again next year. Birds will be looking for winter roosts, so do this as soon as possible. If they are already familiar with a box by spring, they are more likely to select it as a nesting site.



▲ LEAVE SEEDHEADS

Many grasses, such as the huge range of *Miscanthus* varieties available, have attractive seedheads that can be left on the plants over autumn and winter. Their dry plumes look attractive, especially when dusted with winter frost.

► PLANT FRUIT TREES

Now's the time to order and plant bare-root trees. Prepare the ground first by digging in plenty of well-rotted organic matter to improve the soil structure. A feed of general fertilizer will also help to get your trees off to a good start.



▲ STORE WINTER SQUASHES

Pumpkins and winter squashes can be left on the plant during autumn to reach their maximum size and develop brightly coloured skins. Do not leave on the plant over winter as they may rot or be eaten by pests. Once "cured" in the sun for ten days, they can be stored. Keep them in a dry, well-ventilated, frost-free place, checking regularly for damage or decay.



▲ CLEAN TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

Take advantage of the quieter winter months in the garden to check over and clean all your garden equipment before storing it. Clean or discard any old pots and trays that you're not intending to reuse, as well as checking tools and getting the lawnmower serviced and sharpened. You won't need to mow the lawn itself over the winter – just avoid walking on it in frosty weather to try to prevent damage.

