

WHAT TO DO IN AUGUST

AROUND THE GARDEN

Use water wisely, but during hot weather make sure that bird baths and other containers that wildlife drink from are topped up regularly.

Be vigilant in watching for pests and diseases.

Warm, dry weather encourages diseases such as mildew (a white powdery coating on stems and leaves). Preventative fungicide sprays can be used, but by

ensuring the plants do not come under any stress – for instance, lack of water – the plants will stand up to any problems much better. There will be the usual army of aphids about; these can be kept in check by squashing them by hand. If you have a bad infestation, control them by using a suitable pesticide that is available from garden centres and spray in the evening when fewer beneficial insects are around.

In damp summers, slug damage to plants in the garden can be rather dispiriting. The lush and greener foliage is, the more they like it. But there are ways to combat the onslaught without resorting to pellets. First of all, birds, ground beetles, and frogs all eat slugs, so the more they can be encouraged into the garden the better. Put down pieces of slate or wood in the border for the slugs to creep under. They like dark, cool, moist hiding places. These traps can then be turned over, exposing the slugs to any birds in the vicinity – or pick them up and dispose of them. Other traps that work well include beer traps. You could also try inverted hollow grapefruit or orange halves placed about the border or hollowed-out potatoes – these are often used as decoys by vegetable gardeners trying to protect a potato crop. Plants that are particularly prone to slug attack can be surrounded with a layer of crushed eggshells or grit. Slugs don't like the coarse surface and so are less likely to reach the plants.

Continue weeding borders regularly, while watching for any self-sown seedlings. It is surprising what you can find. Most hybrids and many cultivars of plants will not reproduce true from seed, but the seedlings that do emerge can throw up all sorts of variations in flower colour, plant growth habit, and even leaf colour. You never know when you might discover a winner of a plant in your own back yard.



Slugs and hostas Use a copper band around the rim of a terracotta pot to act as a barrier to slugs, which are particularly keen on hostas. A layer of vaseline is also worth trying – slugs don't like it because of its water-repelling properties.

TREES AND SHRUBS

■ **Continue to deadhead roses.** Remove the fading flowers to prevent plants putting energy into producing seeds. Instead, that energy will go into new growth and more flowers. Even when deadheaded now, modern roses can still produce new shoots that will flower before the end of the season. It is not uncommon these days, with milder winters, to see roses blooming into November or even later. Prune back to at least one or two leaves below the base of the flowered shoots, to a healthy, outward-facing bud. You may have to prune harder than this to find a good bud; the harder you prune, the more strongly the new shoot will grow.

Pruning and training

■ **Trim lavender lightly.** At this time, you want to remove the old flower spikes. Go over the plants with a pair of hand shears, cutting off the old flower spikes and about 2.5cm (1in) of the leafy growth at the tips of the shoots. This will encourage sideshoots to grow, keeping the plants bushy and compact.

Lavender rarely grows again from old wood and if plants have become old and straggly, it is best to either take cuttings from them or remove the old plants altogether and buy in new plants. If your soil is on the heavy side, with a high clay content, incorporate plenty of coarse grit before planting new lavenders. This will improve drainage, which they will enjoy.

Propagation

■ **Continue to take semi-ripe cuttings** from shrubs. These cuttings are taken when the bases of the young shoots are beginning to turn woody or ripen. Take the cuttings in the early part of the day or in the evening, when it is cooler.

Almost all of the popular garden shrubs we grow can be increased by taking these cuttings, although you need patience while

they grow to maturity. Plants to try include berberis, buddlejias, box, ceanothus, choisya, cistus, cytiscus, ericas, escallonia, hebes, lavenders, philadelphus, potentilla, pyracantha, santolina, and viburnums.

■ Layer rhododendrons and azaleas.

These plants are difficult to root from cuttings, but they are easy to propagate by layering. Choose a flexible young shoot that is growing close to the ground, so that it can be bent easily into the soil. Then remove a few leaves 10–15cm (4–6in) from the shoot tip. Wound the shoot at the point that will be buried by cutting part of the way through it, or carefully twisting it until it just begins to crack.

Make a small depression in the soil and hold the shoot in place in the depression with a wire hoop. Cover up the stem with soil, insert a cane next to the shoot, and tie the shoot to the cane so that the tip of the shoot remains upright.

To conserve as much moisture as possible, place a brick or large stone over the stem in the soil. After about a year has gone by, the layer should have produced a good root system and it can be cut from the parent and planted out.

Hedges

■ **Most hedges** can be given their final trim towards the end of the month as they will not grow much after this, although conifers may need another going-over. If you want a level top to the hedge, fix a post at either end and tie twine between them at the required height. Trim the sides of the hedge first, working from the bottom up, whether using either a powered hedge trimmer or hand shears. The reason for working upwards is that as you cut, the trimmings will fall away and you will be better able to see where you are going.

Make the hedge wider at the base and narrower at the top. This way it will stand

up to the weather better. The top can be trimmed last, using the twine as a guide.

You may have trimmed conifer hedges last month; if not, do it now. It is often recommended that conifer hedges only be trimmed with shears, because powered hedge trimmers bruise the growth. This can happen, but damage is so minimal that it doesn't really make any difference. The key point with conifer hedges is never to let them get beyond the height and width you want, as none will regrow if cut back into hard, old wood. The only exception is yew. It can be cut back to very old wood and will still grow again.

Large-leaved hedges such as spotted laurel (*Aucuba*) cannot be trimmed with shears or hedge trimmers, however, because these would cut through the large leaves, causing the edges to go brown. The way to cut these hedges is with a pair of secateurs. Put posts and string across the top, as described for other hedges and trim the sides first in the same way, starting at the base and working up. It can be a tiresome task, especially if you have a large hedge, but it is well worth the effort as the hedge will look so much better with no browned-off foliage.



Encourage your box hedge Create a good, manageable shape with regular, light pruning. Shears are the tool of choice for this task.

CLIMBERS

■ **Prune rambling roses** after they have flowered. Pruning of woody plants, most especially roses, can sometimes be portrayed as being very complicated and this may make you hesitant when it comes to doing the job. But pruning this kind of rose is, in fact, very easy. All you have to remember is that these roses produce flowers on wood produced the previous year. All sideshoots that have flowered can be pruned back to one or two buds from the main stems. Any new, strong growths can be tied in to replace older shoots and any very old stems can be pruned out to the ground, so encouraging more new shoots from the base of the plant.

■ **Propagate clematis by layering.** Select a shoot growing from near the base of the plant and lay it on the ground. To encourage the formation of roots, cut part-way through the stem at each of the leaf joints, being careful not to cut right through the stem. If you want to, you can apply some hormone rooting solution to each cut, but it's not essential. Make some wire hoops and peg each leaf joint to the surface of the soil. Each can be covered with a little soil if you wish. After a few weeks, roots will begin to form and new growth will appear from each leaf joint.



Clematis 'Lady Londesborough'



Rambling roses Prune the flowered sideshoots hard to encourage more next year.

The new plants can then be separated from the parent plant, potted up individually and grown on.

■ **Complete the summer pruning of wisteria,** pruning all the long, whippy sideshoots to five or six buds from the main stems. This will encourage the plant to produce flower buds for next year's flowers. If you require any growth for tying in to extend the framework of the plant you can leave it unpruned.

One of the most common questions put to gardening experts is – why does my wisteria not flower? Lack of correct pruning is often the reason given, which rather puts the blame on the gardener. However, the main reason for wisterias not flowering is that they are not named hybrids and have not been grafted. To see if the plant has been grafted, look at the base of the stem to check that there is a slightly swollen area; the point where the plant was grafted. So always make sure you get a named variety. Often some garden centres and market stalls sell unnamed seedlings, which can take many years to flower, if at all.

PERENNIALS

■ **Chrysanthemums and dahlias** are terrific plants for displaying throughout late summer and autumn until the first frosts. They also last well as cut flowers. The more you cut dahlias (they make great arrangements in the house), the more flowers you get. But they both have one problem and that is that the flowers are irresistible to earwigs.

The best way to control these is to put upturned pots filled with straw or shredded newspaper on the top of canes among the plants. Earwigs love to crawl into dark places during the day. In the morning you can empty the pots of earwigs and dispose of them.

■ **Continue collecting ripening seeds** of perennials. Collecting and sowing your own seed is the most rewarding aspect of gardening. Collect the seedheads carefully into a paper bag. Spread the seeds on a sheet of paper and leave to dry. Separate the chaff from the seeds and store them in labelled paper envelopes.

Some seeds can be sown straight away as they germinate best if they are fresh (such as meconopsis, cyclamen, aconites, and delphiniums) and kept in a cold frame over winter; others can be stored in a cool, dark place until spring.



Ripening geranium seeds The seed pods all too readily spring open to disperse the seeds.



Penstemon cuttings Propagate these attractive perennials by taking stem-tip cuttings.

■ **Take cuttings of penstemons,** which do not divide easily like other perennials. Take the cuttings in the same way as for pelargoniums.

■ **Cut back perennials** that have collapsed or spread over the lawn and other plants in the border. In wet weather a lot of taller-growing perennials, especially achilleas, tend to flop over and smother other smaller plants. Trim them back from the smaller plants to give the latter a chance to recover and flower. The cut-back plants may also grow again and produce some flowers in the autumn.

You may find that perennials that have spread over the lawn will have killed off the grass in that area. Trim the perennials back off the lawn. Give this bare patch of grass a good watering and a dose of lawn fertilizer and it will very quickly regrow.

■ **Hardy geraniums** that were not cut back earlier should be cut back now to make them look neater. Again they will produce new growth, which may flower again later in the autumn. Feed and water them to encourage growth.

■ **Continue to propagate carnations** and pinks by layering. Once the layers produce roots, usually in five to six weeks, they can be separated from the parent plant and planted in their flowering positions. There is no need to use hormone rooting solution as the stems root easily. If you find nicking the stems a little tricky, slightly twist the stem between your fingers until you feel that it is beginning to crack and peg this part of the stem in the soil.

■ **Start dividing perennials** towards the end of the month. If the soil is dry, wait or water the plants thoroughly an hour or two before and afterwards.

Alpines

■ **Take cuttings of alpines.** Many alpines, such as aubrieta, *Phlox douglasii*, *P. subulata*, and the dwarf helianthemums, can easily be propagated from cuttings. Take small non-flowering shoot tips about 5cm (2in) long, removing the lowest leaves, and insert them into gritty compost – equal parts peat-free compost and perlite or vermiculite, with a handful of horticultural grit added.

Put the cuttings in a warm propagator, spray them daily with clear water to maintain a humid atmosphere and shade in hot, sunny weather, and in five or six weeks they should have rooted. If you're not sure whether they have rooted, give the cuttings the gentlest tug; if there is resistance then roots have formed. The cuttings can then be potted up.

■ **Continue to weed between alpines,** and top up with fresh grit. Grit or gravel around the plants not only makes them look terrific; it also stops rain splashing soil onto the plants, keeps down weeds, and retains moisture in the soil.

BULBS

■ **Plant daffodils and narcissi** before the end of next month. Daffodils look particularly good when they are planted in drifts, naturalized in grass. Bear in mind, though, that the grass will have to be left uncut for at least six weeks after the flowers are over, to allow the bulb to build up its flower bud for the following spring. Dwarf varieties also look good in rock gardens or in raised beds, where the flowers can be appreciated more easily.

If you are planting the bulbs in a border where you don't need to lift them, always mark them with a label; you may well forget where they are after the flowers and foliage have died down and it's all too easy to dig them up again.

The general rule for depth of planting for any bulb is to plant two to three times its own depth. If you're not sure, it's better to plant a little too deeply than too shallowly. If your soil happens to be a heavy clay, add some grit to the planting hole and sit the bulbs on this. Bulb-planting tools make the job of planting large quantities of bulbs much easier. Leave tulip bulbs until late October or November before planting.



Bulbs in a lawn Place bone meal, mixed with a little soil, into each prepared bulb hole.

ANNUALS AND BEDDING

■ **Plant colchicums** (often misleadingly called the "autumn crocus"). The flowers of this bulb appear before the leaves and it can look rather too startling on its own, so plant it in among other plants or naturalize it in grass.

■ **Plant madonna lilies** (*Lilium candidum*). Most lilies are planted from November until the spring, but the madonna lily is best planted this month as it is dormant. It will start into growth next month. The most likely source of these exquisite bulbs is from a bulb specialist and sent by mail order. Most of these companies advertise in the gardening press, so this is a good place to look.

Plant the bulbs in a warm, sunny spot in well-drained soil. These lily bulbs must not be planted as deeply as you would plant other lilies. Cover the bulbs with no more than 2.5–5cm (1–2in) of soil. Always feed them after flowering.

■ **Pot prepared hyacinths** and other bulbs such as 'Paper White' narcissi for flowers at Christmas. If you are planting them in bulb bowls that have no drainage holes, use bulb fibre; otherwise, any proprietary potting compost will do.

Plant several bulbs in a bowl or pot, close enough together so that they are almost touching. Then cover them with compost, leaving just the nose of the bulbs uncovered. Next "plunge" the containers outside, covering them with compost, or, alternatively, put them in a cool, dark place. After six to eight weeks have gone by, start inspecting the bulbs every day and when they have made about 2.5cm (1in) of growth they can be brought inside into cool conditions.

■ **Continue to deadhead annuals** in borders, to prevent the plants' energies going into producing seeds and extend the flowering period into autumn. However, no matter how regularly you deadhead, some of the earlier-sown hardy annuals will be over later in the month. These can be cleared away and consigned to the compost heap. Gaps in borders can be filled with larger plants in pots, either planting or plunging them, to be lifted easily in the autumn.

■ **This is the traditional month** for taking cuttings from pelargoniums, fuchsias, and other tender perennials. They can, of course, be taken at other times from spring through until autumn. But if they are taken later than September, then don't pot them up until the spring.

The cuttings are very easy to take, only those of pelargoniums differing in one or two ways. All cuttings should be removed from the parent plant by cutting off strong, non-flowering shoots just above a bud, leaving a cutting about 10cm (4in) long. Trim the lower leaves off and then trim the cutting immediately below a leaf joint. With all pelargoniums, remove the stipules – the little papery flaps – at the base of the leaf stalks. Pelargoniums do not need hormone rooting solution; they root



Drying seeds Spread seedheads on newspaper to dry out before you sift and sort them.

perfectly well without it. All other kinds of cuttings will benefit from being dipped in hormone rooting solution. Insert the cuttings around the edge of small pots containing cuttings compost (half peat-free compost, half perlite or vermiculite), and cover all kinds except pelargoniums with polythene; the fine hairs on the leaves will trap moisture and may cause the cuttings to rot. Place the pots on the windowsill or in a shady part of the greenhouse. The cuttings will root in about four weeks, when they can be potted on to overwinter under cover.

■ **Some hardy annuals** can be sown outside now and next month to overwinter and flower early in the summer next year.

■ **Collect seeds from hardy annuals.** Seed can be collected from most hardy annuals except the F1 hybrids, which will not come true to type. Harvest the seeds on a dry sunny day, into paper bags. Tip them onto a sheet of paper and sort them out from the chaff. This is well worth doing to get clean seeds. Any debris left in with the seeds may cause them to rot so an old flour sieve can be useful. Store the seeds in labelled paper envelopes. Store in a cool, dry place; an airtight box in the bottom of the fridge is ideal.

CONTAINERS

■ **Continue watering and feeding** bedding plants in hanging baskets, tubs, and other containers. Watering may have to be done several times a day when the weather is very hot. Feed at least once a week with a high-potash fertilizer to encourage the plants to bloom well into autumn.

■ **Remember also to feed permanent** plants such as shrubs, perennials, and trees in containers. These need looking after just as much as temporary summer bedding plants. They require regular feeding and watering and again, especially with woody plants, feed with a high-potash fertilizer to encourage ripening of the wood rather than the production of soft, sappy growth, which may be damaged in winter.

■ **Make sure containers** will be cared for if you are going on holiday. Before you go, group all the containers together in a shady spot, if this is possible. This will make it easier for the person watering, as well as benefiting the plants: a more humid atmosphere is maintained around the leaves where plants are clustered together. In normal circumstances this is not to be recommended, as crowded growth encourages diseases to spread. But it's fine for a week or two. Hanging baskets can be taken down and grouped with the others by perching them on buckets or on upturned pots.



Convenience food Feed plants in containers regularly to prolong the display. The simplest way is to add soluble fertilizer to the watering can.

LAWNS

■ **Continue to mow the lawn regularly**, raising the blades if the weather is very hot and dry. The frequency of mowing can also be reduced in hot, dry weather, as the grass won't be growing much.

■ **Grass clippings** can be left on the lawn in dry weather. Nobody likes grass clippings trailed into the house and this is easily done when they stick to your shoes in damp weather. But in dry spells, leave the grass box off the mower and the clippings will act as a mulch for the grass, helping to retain moisture in the soil and returning organic matter at the same time.

■ **Apply a fertilizer** with a high phosphate content. In late summer it is not advisable to apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer to a lawn as it will promote vigorous growth, which will not stand up to the rigours of the winter. Fertilizers high in phosphates will instead promote root growth, toughening up the grass for the winter ahead. Apply all fertilizers according to the manufacturer's instructions. A wheeled fertilizer spreader will take the guesswork out of applying the feed and saves the chore of marking out the area to do it by hand. You may be able to hire one from your local garden centre or hire shop.



Feed your lawn If you mark out rectangular areas to treat one at a time, this will help achieve an even spread.

■ **Don't water unless absolutely necessary.** There is no point in watering established lawns, as they will soon recover whenever rain does come. Grass has remarkable powers of recovery.

New lawns

■ **Continue to water** new lawns regularly.

■ **Prepare for sowing seed or laying turf** next month. To create a good lawn from scratch takes work, but done properly it is well worth the effort and you will be pleased with the results. Preparation is the key to success and autumn is a good time for making a new lawn. There is usually more moisture in the ground; heavy autumn dews making a contribution. New lawns need a lot of water. Seed must have water to germinate and grow and if turf dries out it shrinks. It's impossible to get rid of the cracks along the joins. With the warm, moist weather of autumn you should not need to water new lawns as frequently as during late spring and summer and the grass will establish before winter, ready to grow strongly in spring.

Dig over the area thoroughly, removing every trace of perennial weeds. Make sure all their roots are removed or they will grow again. Mowing keeps broad-leaved perennial weeds down in lawns if you are not too fussy about their appearance, but some cause other problems: nettles, for example, can ruin a lawn as a play area. Leave the soil for a few weeks to allow annual weeds to germinate and then hoe these off, removing them to the compost heap. Preparing the ground a few weeks before you sow seed or lay turf will also allow the cultivated soil to settle, making it easier to level, or you could let the weeds come up on prepared soil and then run over it with a glyphosate weedkiller.

VEGETABLES AND HERBS

■ **Sow green manure crops** on vacant ground. If you find it difficult to obtain enough garden compost or farmyard manure to pile on beds, a good substitute is to grow a green manure crop on ground that is vacant. Rape and mustard are fast-growing crops that can be dug in during the autumn, before the plants begin to flower and are killed off by frosts. Other green manures can be sown then to overwinter. These seeds are easily sown by broadcasting. Just lightly fork over the soil and rake it level, scatter the seeds, and rake them into the soil surface. This is an easy way to add organic matter to the soil, improve soil structure, and reduce the problem of nutrients being leached from bare ground. By covering the ground with a "living mulch" you also reduce the need to weed it.

Harvesting

■ **Harvest onions** when the foliage collapses, if they weren't ready last month. It is often recommended that you bend over the tops of onions to ripen them, but this happens naturally and there is no need to do it for the plants. Choosing a dry day if you can, gently ease the onions out of the soil to break the roots' hold. Leave the onions on the surface to dry. It's important that they are properly dry if they are to



Dry shallots You can place shallots on soil or a chicken-wire rack to dry them out.



Green manure This is a crop that is grown especially to be dug back into the soil.

store well. If the weather turns wet, cover them with a sheet of polythene or cloches, or lay them out in a shed or greenhouse.

■ **Keep harvesting crops** while they are young as vegetables have a much better flavour when they are picked young. As they age, flavour and texture become coarser. If marrows and courgettes are harvested regularly, the plants produce more flowers and fruits to continue the crop well into autumn. Summer cabbages should be ready to eat too now; cut them before pests get to them first.

■ **Harvest beans and freeze them.** Fresh vegetables direct from the plant to the kitchen and cooked within a short time have the best flavour of all, but there are times when you get a glut of some crops and can't cope with them all. Freezing is one way around the problem and most vegetables, including French and runner beans and podded broad beans, can be frozen. This is the perfect way to avoid wasting them. They will provide a welcome vegetable through the winter.

Sowing and planting outdoors

■ **Sow Japanese onions** to harvest in early summer next year. Japanese onions

are also available as onion sets. Before sowing seeds or planting sets, rake down the soil and incorporate a general organic fertilizer. For seeds, take out shallow drills 30cm (12in) apart and water the drills if the soil is dry. Sow the seeds thinly along the drills and cover with dry soil. Thin out to 8–15cm (3–6in) in the spring. In colder areas it may be useful to cover the young plants with cloches during severe winter weather. Japanese onion sets can be planted a little later than seeds, in October or November. Onions of both sets and seeds should be ready to harvest in July the following year, giving an early harvest before other onions are ready.

■ **Sow some salad crops now.** This is the last month for sowing salad crops outdoors, but it is worth trying a few. Not all of them will mature, but you will at least get some fresh, young salad material in the autumn. Seeds to sow include lettuce, radish, salad onions, red chicory, and spinach. It's even worth trying some peas, sowing an early variety such as 'Douce Provence'. You may be lucky with good weather in the autumn. Don't expect to get a great crop, but some fresh peas are always welcome.

■ **Continue to sow spring cabbages** at intervals. Sow the seeds in wetted shallow drills, covering with dry soil. Transplant the seedlings when they are large enough to handle. Plant them 15cm (6in) apart in rows that are 30cm (1ft) apart.

Looking after crops

■ **Continue watering and weeding regularly.** The weather can often be very dry in August and it is important to keep vegetables well watered if they are not to bolt and run to seed. Plants such as celery and tomatoes need regular watering, or celery will bolt quickly and tomatoes will

suffer problems such as blossom end rot (dark-brown patches on the base of the tomatoes) due to a lack of water. Irregular watering will also cause tomato skins to split; after a dry spell, if they are given a lot of water, the upsurge of sap in the stems causes the skins to rupture.

Weeds rob valuable moisture from crops. They also act as host plants to pests and diseases, so by keeping them down problems are reduced.

■ **Look out for pests** and use a physical barrier to prevent them getting at crops. A second generation of carrot fly is about now, so make sure vulnerable crops are protected. Crops can be grown under horticultural fleece from sowing to harvesting, as it lets in light and water, but protects plants from insects. Make sure it is tucked into the soil or weighted down, or insects will crawl under it.

■ **Continue earthing up celery.** Blanching makes tough stems more palatable and easier to cook. Draw earth up from either side of the rows until only foliage is showing. Each time this is done, put a collar of paper around the plant to prevent the soil getting into its heart, causing disease to set in. Self-blanching celery may be left to grow on normally.

■ **Marrows left to grow larger** for storing over winter are best raised off the ground slightly to expose them to the sun to ripen. This will also help to prevent rotting caused by the fruits sitting on damp earth. Support them on a block of wood or a couple of bricks. Remove some of the old leaves so that more sunlight can get at the fruits to ripen them. Harvest before the first frosts in autumn.

■ **Stop outdoor tomatoes** when they have produced four trusses of fruit, if this was

not done last month. The summer in this country is too short to get more fruits from outdoor-grown plants. Remove any sideshoots growing from the leaf axils. Any old foliage can be removed at the same time. Foliage clustered around the trusses of fruit can be thinned too. This will allow more light to fall on to and ripen the fruits and improve air circulation, thus reducing the risk of diseases such as botrytis getting a hold and spoiling the fruits.

Herbs

■ **Make a sowing of parsley** to last through the winter. Sow the seeds in shallow drills outside and thin the seedlings to about 15cm (6in) apart when they are large enough to handle. It is worth covering the seeds with fleece to protect them from the second generation of carrot flies, which will be around now. Parsley belongs to the same plant family as carrots and is therefore subject to the same range of pests. Cover the young plants with cloches later in the autumn to protect them from the worst of the winter weather. Alternatively, lift a few seedlings and pot them up and grow on in a cool greenhouse or on the windowsill in the kitchen and you will have a supply of fresh parsley to hand through the winter.

■ **Pot up other herbs such as chives** for use during the winter. Lift a clump of chives from the garden; if it is fairly large, split it into smaller clumps. This way you may get several pieces to pot up. Put each piece into a pot with general, multi-purpose compost, cut back the old foliage and water them in. Stand the pots on the windowsill or in a cool greenhouse or conservatory and in a few weeks you will have a fresh supply of chives.

■ **Take semi-ripe cuttings** from shrubby herbs like bay, hyssop, rosemary, and sage.

Pot up chives

1 Dig up a clump of chives from the garden with a spade or fork. Shake off the soil.



2 Pull the clump apart into sections. Use a knife to help if necessary.



3 Pot up the small clumps individually in small pots, using a peat-free compost.



4 Cut back the leaves to about 5cm (2in) and water by standing the pot in a dish or tray of water.

FRUIT

Picking and storing

■ **Harvest early apples and pears.** You can tell when the fruit is ready to harvest as there will be one or two fruits on the ground. A more reliable way is to cup it in your hand and gently twist it. If it is ripe the fruit should part from the tree, stalk intact, with almost no effort at all. If it does not part from the tree, leave it there for a few more days.

Early-cropping apples and pears don't store for very long and they are best used soon after picking. Damaged fruits should be used first if damage is not too severe, otherwise put them on the compost heap.

Looking after crops

■ **Pay attention to fruit trees** trained against walls. The base of a wall can be a very dry place indeed, especially if it is a house wall and there are overhanging eaves. So it is vital that these trees are watered regularly. It's amazing how quickly the soil dries out. After watering give the trees a thick mulch of organic matter to help retain the moisture.

Pruning and training

■ **Continue pruning summer-fruiting raspberries.** Cut out the old fruiting canes and tie in the new canes that have grown this year. Any that grow beyond the height of the topmost wire of the support can be pruned back to the top wire in the winter. Any weak canes should be pruned out rather than tied in as they will not bear much fruit. The old canes that have been pruned out can be shredded and then used as a mulch in other parts of the garden. If you haven't got a shredder, one can easily be found in your local hire shop.

■ Summer-prune trained fruit trees.

Summer pruning of cordon and espalier forms of fruit trees couldn't be easier; try and get it all finished this month.



Testing ripeness Cup the fruit in your palm and twist it gently. It should drop into your hand.

■ Cordon apple and pear trees should have the side growths from the main stem cut back to 8cm (3in). Those shoots that were pruned in the same way last year will have produced sideshoots of their own and these need to be pruned back to 2.5cm (1in). This encourages formation of fruit-bearing spurs for next year. When the leading shoot extending the height of the cordon has reached the limit of the support, prune it like the sidegrowths.

■ Espalier and fan-trained trees should be pruned in the same way.

■ Trained forms of acid cherries, nectarines, and peaches need all the shoots growing from the main branches pruned to 10cm (4in), and sideshoots from these pruned to 5cm (2in).

■ For fan-trained plums, damsons, and sweet cherries, prune back by half all the shoots that have borne fruit.

■ **Finish off summer-pruning** cordon- and fan-trained gooseberries and redcurrants.

Planting

■ **Plant new strawberry plants** in ground prepared last month, provided that you are not in the middle of a drought: if so, wait until September. If your old plants are healthy and show no signs of virus disease, use some of their runners, or plantlets, which you may have pegged down into pots. But if there are signs of virus, which usually shows up as streaks through the foliage, then start afresh with strawberries from a specialist fruit grower, where you know the stock has been certified as being free from viruses.

Grow the strawberries on ground that has not grown them for a few years. You can move a strawberry bed in stages – if you have, say, three rows of fruit growing in the vegetable garden, renew one row each year.

Plant the new row to one side of the existing rows and remove the last old row on the other side. Do this each year and you will gradually work your way down the vegetable plot, planting new strawberries in fresh ground each year.

Keep newly planted strawberries well watered. Planting them now enables the plants to build up and get well established before the winter, but if they go short of water this will not happen.

Propagation

■ **Strawberry runners** that were pegged down last month can be cut from the parent plant, either to be planted out or potted up to be forced inside during the winter to get early fruit in the spring. Pot these plants up into 18cm (7in) pots and leave them outside for the rest of the summer. In autumn, lay the pots on their sides to protect them from the winter wet. After Christmas the pots can be taken inside in stages, to provide a succession of fruits whenever they are scarce and expensive in the shops.

UNDER COVER

■ **Check greenhouse heaters** are in working order. Winter may still seem a long way off, but the sooner this job is done the better. It is better to have portable heaters sent off for a professional service. Fixed electric-heating pipes and gas systems should be checked by a qualified electrician or engineer. Paraffin heaters need to have wicks trimmed or replaced as necessary and then be thoroughly cleaned.

■ **Damp down regularly** during hot, dry weather. It's been stated many times already, but it is a job that gives a good growing atmosphere to plants and helps to control pests like red spider mite. Soak the floor and under the staging and you will, almost immediately, feel the atmosphere cooling as the water evaporates. Do this several times a day in hot weather.

■ **Towards the end of the month** the nights can turn chilly, so it's worth closing ventilators and doors in the evening to maintain a little warmth. But remember to open up again early in the morning.

■ **At the end of the month**, remove shading. The days start to shorten at this time and plants under glass will need all the light they can get. Clean off shading wash with a dry duster, or remove mesh and shake it out and roll it up neatly for storage. Or consider investing in roller blinds for next year. It's an ideal time to make enquiries.

■ **Continue taking cuttings** from pelargoniums, fuchsias, and other tender perennials.

Glasshouse and house plants

■ **Start cyclamen now.** Those cyclamen that were rested in their pots during the summer can be started into growth now. They may already be under way and you

will be able to see small buds growing. Start watering the plants now and scrape away some of the old compost from the surface, top-dressing with some new potting compost. This will give the plants a good start. Cyclamen don't require a lot of heat, so putting them in a cold frame for the rest of the summer is ideal; then bring them inside early next month. Occasionally they will produce an early flower or two, but these are best removed to allow the plant to build up strength before the main flowering period in the winter.

■ Pot bulbs for flowers at Christmas.

The end of the month and early September are the latest times to plant prepared hyacinths and other bulbs to flower in time for Christmas. After about six to eight weeks inspect the bulbs and when they have made about 2.5cm (1in) of growth they can be brought inside to cool conditions. Then, after a few weeks bring them into the warmth to flower in time for Christmas.

■ **Start freesias and lachenalias** into growth. Freesias are beautifully scented flowers produced on wiry stems, ideal for winter flowering in a cool conservatory or greenhouse.

Corms of freesias can be planted from now at intervals over the next few weeks to provide a succession of blooms through the winter. Seven or eight corms can be planted in a 12cm (5in) pot containing multi-purpose compost. Cover the corms with about 2.5cm (1in) of compost. Plunge the pots outside and after about six weeks take them inside to flower. After flowering, feed the plants until the foliage begins to turn yellow and then rest the corms. Lachenalias are also good plants for cool greenhouses, grown in the same way as freesias.

■ **Continue to maintain house plants** by watering and feeding. Plants with large decorative leaves will benefit if the foliage is wiped over once in a while. It is amazing how much dust can settle on leaves, reducing the plant's capability to manufacture its foodstuffs from sunlight. This process of turning light into energy – photosynthesis – is essential for survival.

Crops under glass

■ **Continue to remove** old leaves from tomatoes and other greenhouse crops to aid ripening and air circulation. Yellowing leaves can be removed at the same time, otherwise they will encourage diseases like mildew and botrytis. All these leaves can be put on the compost heap. Tidiness in the greenhouse and conservatory will go a long way to reducing pests and diseases.

■ **Sow parsley for a winter crop.** Sow the seeds in pots or trays, watering compost before sowing and covering the seeds lightly with compost. Put in a sunny spot. When seedlings emerge, pot them up individually when they are large enough to handle and you will get a good crop of parsley to see you through the winter.



Sowing seeds in pots Be sure to label up your pots carefully to avoid confusion later. Seedlings are not always easy to recognize.