

Gardening tips for November

Winter again, already! When was summer and autumn? Any thought of hibernating from the pleasures of winter gardening is probably a good idea but for all you diehard gardeners there is work aplenty so don't let the boggy saturated ground and the bitterly cold icy windy wintery weather deter you from your garden. Handy tools for November are the secateurs and a pruning saw, November is pruning month. Regarding secateurs there are basically two types, bypass and anvil. Bypass secateurs are like a pair of scissors and used for cutting stems up to about 15 mm. Anvil secateurs are a bit like using a knife on a chopping board, they have one sharp blade that closes onto a flat surface and are used on thicker stems and dead wood.

The Kitchen Garden

Start winter-pruning apples and pears. Once most of the leaves have fallen the trees have entered their dormancy therefore begin pruning. You may ask why bother, fruit trees left alone seem to produce abundant fruit. By pruning you can control the shape of the tree and if you cut out old wood the best fruiting branches will be those up to four years old. Try not to give a tree a haircut, aim for more of a thinning, cutting out or reducing branches here and there. Limit the amount of pruning to at most 20% of the canopy.

Winter prune gooseberry bushes when the leaves have fallen and you can see what you are doing. Cut out and dead, diseased or damaged branches and any crossing shoots leaving an open structure.

With blackcurrant and blueberry bushes, remove up to a third of the old stems to almost ground level. Also remove any weak, crowded or diseased branches.

The Flower Garden

Acers or Japanese maples can be pruned to shape, again wait until the leaves have fallen and the tree is dormant. Don't overdo the pruning as it can stress the tree, aim for a maximum of 20% but keep an eye on the weather, don't prune an acer if the temperature is anywhere near freezing.

Deciduous shrubs and hedges can still be pruned in November but don't leave it any later as it will be too cold and wet.

Buddleia can be cut back this month but leave the main pruning until the spring. The benefit of pruning now is that Buddleia puts on so much growth in the summer it is easily damaged by winter weather, so prune some now and the rest in spring.

Not all growth needs cutting back, achilleas, eryngiums, perennial astilbes, sedums, alliums and many ornamental grasses, provide winter interest. Similarly for garden wildlife, easing off on the blank canvass will leave food and shelter in the winter months. The seed heads of teasels, sunflowers, scabious and Michaelmas daisies attract garden bird such as finches which will also hunt out hibernating insects.

Soggy limp annuals can go straight on the compost heap or garden bin, your garden will look better for the clean-up.

Cut back hard, hellebores, delphiniums and Verbascum. Black spot can overwinter on hellebores infecting new flowers as they emerge, therefore cut off old foliage leaving the good-marbled leaves. Cut back the hollow stems of Delphiniums to the ground, to prevent slugs hiding inside and eating the crowns. Drop a slug pellet or two down the remains of each stem. Take the same approach with perennial lobelias and overwintered dahlias. Both Verbascums and foxgloves should be cut back hard to prevent self-seeding and to encourage the rosettes of foliage to overwinter. It is from these rosettes that next year's flowering stems will emerge in late spring.

Cut back hybrid teas and floribundas roses by about a third, remove all the old flowering wood from ramblers, this will reduce their weight and leave room for new spring growth. Major pruning can wait until March.

Reduce penstemons by half, leaving some evergreen foliage to protect the crowns.

Some chrysanthemums are less hardy, so cut them back by half after flowering. This will reduce wind rock but still provide greater protection for the overwintering crowns.

Cut autumn asters back to about a third of their height immediately after flowering. Avoid cutting the stems too closely to the ground, as they serve as winter protection. Autumn asters can also be cut back in spring and the plant will sprout near the ground.

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Keep gardening.

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