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**OBSERVER
ORGANIC ALLOTMENT
BLOG**

Things to do in October

Caroline Foley's expert guide to gardening this month



Your apples and pears should be laden with fruit

One of the more wonderful and remarkable changes on the allotment scene lately has been the advent of more community orchards. Some councils are now allowing them in areas of sites that are not suitable for crops. Having a stake in a community orchard is usually separate from being a plot holder and is on the lines of shared labour for a share of the harvest.

Joining an orchard is a good excuse for a party – or a wassail to be precise. By singing to the fruit trees, slapping them around with sticks and hanging bread soaked in cider or ale from the branches to humour them, it is hoped to wake them from their winter slumbers so they can get along with producing a good crop



If it has worked well, the apple and pear trees should be laden with fruit this month. Pears are picked when hard and left to ripen in the bowl. This is because they ripen from the core outwards. If left too long on the tree they get over ripe and go brown in the middle before ripening on the outside.

It is best to wrap apples individually in paper so any duds won't affect the others. The ideal temperature for apple storage is 0°C (32°F) - three degrees higher than an apple's freezing point. This is out of the question for the home grower, needless to say, but keep them as cool as you can. Aim for high humidity, 80 – 90% is recommended. If you are storing them in a shed, an old trick to keep the humidity up is to hang up an old blanket with one end dipped into a bucket of water.

Different types of apples store better than others, a consideration if you are buying new stock. A Gala apple will store for one to three months, whereas a stalwart Granny Smith will store for up to five and last right through to spring.



To protect your apples, plums, pears and cherries trees from the winter moth, Cheimatobia brumata, put on grease bands about 45cm above soil level. In November the wingless females emerge from their chrysalises in the soil and climb up trees to mate. The resulting eggs hatch out precisely at budburst when the 2.5cm green caterpillars get down to business chomping through and destroying the new young leaves, blossom and the forming fruitlets.

The moths are helpful to tits as they also breed in large trees like oak, sycamore, hornbeam and beech. These trees are big enough to recover from the onslaught and the tits will demolish the caterpillar population en masse to feed their young.



Shallots are an easy crop to start off from sets now. They need practically no attention, apart from hand weeding. Shallots store longer than onions, lasting nine months to a year. For every bulblet planted you should get around 18 back - good odds by any standards. Like garlic, tradition says to plant on the shortest day of the year and harvest on the longest. This can be loosely interpreted as any time in the New Year up to March, though earlier is better. However, there are a couple of varieties that do well when planted this month or next. The strong flavoured 'Eschalotte Grise', otherwise known as the 'banana shallot' is claimed to be the French chef's top favourite. For a more delicate flavour, try the new Dutch introduction, the disease and bolt resistant

'Yellow Moon'.

Plant them with the tips just showing. Cover with fleece or netting quickly as birds like nothing better than to pluck them straight out of the ground. If the shallots do get unearthed, plant them back carefully.

Garlic needs 30 – 60 days of cold so is best planted out between now and November. Aim for a week or so before the frosts in the local area. Split the bulbs into individual cloves and plant the right way up. Each clove will make a full head of garlic - a multiplication of nine or ten.



To start with buy a certified disease free bulb. Good varieties are those from other countries that have been developed for the UK climate – mostly, so one might deduct, on the Isle of Wight. These include 'Albigensian Wight' (a French variety that stores well but is still under trial), 'Early Purple Wight' (AGM – non-storing type), 'Iberian Wight' (soft necked variety from Cordoba in Spain), 'Lautrec Wight' (from Lautrec in S. W. France, home of garlic festivals. It is considered to be France's finest pink garlic - 'l'ail rose) and 'Purple Moldovan Wight' which is a large strong-tasting heirloom garlic from Spain.

There are two schools of thought about sowing broad beans. If you sow now you can steal a march and get ahead of the black fly season. Others say that an October sowing is not worth risking for a minimal advantage. If sowing now, choose a sheltered and well-drained site and protect with covers in all but the mildest places. The most famous variety for winter beans is 'Aquadulce Claudia'. This is a tall bean and will need staking. 'The Sutton' doesn't grow taller than 45cm (18 in) so it has the advantage of fitting under cloches. Both types have the RHS Award of Garden Merit.

The green manure choices get slimmer week by week. We are now reduced to choosing between field beans – the agricultural version of broad beans, *Vicia faba*, and grazing rye, *Secale cereal*.



Grazing rye is an effective weed suppressant. It builds up a thick mat of foliage quickly

while its wide-ranging root system will channel into the soil breaking it up while conversely knitting it together to prevent nutrients leaching out. The roots will mop up any fertilizer, store it and release it back into the soil when it is dug in.

However, there is no denying that digging grazing rye out in spring is a tough job. Another point to watch is that if you are planning to grow vegetables with fine seed (like carrots) afterwards you will need to leave the land for a few weeks after digging it in as the rotting foliage inhibits germination in plants with small seeds.



Field beans were traditionally grown as horse feed, hence the expression 'full of beans'. As nitrogen fixers, they will add nitrogen to the soil when dug in. They do best in heavier soils and won't survive drought. Otherwise they are generally trouble free. A good idea might be to alternate rows of beans with rows of grazing rye, thereby getting the best from both.

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lazymindsdislike

5 October 2009 11:08AM

We just harvested golden quinces (more different fragrance elements than roses), walnuts and chestnuts too, and a bit of warm late sun, the crossing cranes told us to storage in our hearts, till they come back.

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thegoodlifeonline

8 October 2009 9:13PM

I have been producing my own organic food for years now and am trying to help inspire do the same, I grow vegetables and herbs and produce all my own meats.

Do you fancy producing your own sausages or traditional british vegetables?

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