

**the**guardian

# OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



## Things to do in September

Our expert's guide to gardening this month

---

**Caroline Foley**

guardian.co.uk, Friday 27 August 2010 11.16 BST

---



Overwintered onions produce the biggest and best bulbs

Winter seed, if sown in September, should establish with speed and be sturdy enough to survive the first frosts with covers. Crops grow slowly through winter due to shorter day lengths and fluctuations in temperature. They will tick over gently 4–7C (40 - 45F), but, as soon as it drops below that, growth pauses until the weather improves. Crop covers will extend the amount of 'growing days' - 250 – 300 on average in the UK - by some two weeks each end of the season.

As the spring planted onions are harvested for winter storage, you can plant sets of the overwintering types that will cover the onion gap next summer. Overwintering onions produce the biggest and best bulbs but don't store for long.

Find a sunny spot,, fertilize the ground well and plant them about 7.5cm apart with the growing tip just below the surface. Brown skinned 'Swift' and 'Radar' and the red onion 'Electric' can be pulled out 'green' from May onwards and will be full sized by June or July.

The original Japanese overwintering onions 'Senshyu Yellow' is another good bet. <http://www.vegetable-garden-guide.com/how-to-grow-onions.html> while 'Tough Ball' claims to have extra storage power. For winter spring onions plant shallot sets and use the tops as a substitute.



Sweet peas sown in

September will make better plants than spring-sown ones

Winter is a great time for growing all sorts of high vitamin greens. Turnips sown now are grown for winter greens rather than for their roots. Some varieties have been developed purely for their leaves. 'Cima di Rapa 40' – the sprouting turnip top or broccoli raab - will be ready in 40 days and can be harvested over the months. In Italy it is a prized Puglian speciality green for the pasta dish 'orecchiate e cima di rapa'.

It is easy to keep up a supply of salad leaves. If you want to grow lettuces to full size, choose hardy varieties like the heirloom 'Winter Density' - a cos type - or one of the winter butterheads. 'Arctic King' was bred purely for winter growing and has exceptional hardiness, as does 'Valdor'. Lettuce seeds sown this month generally germinate quickly and can be thinned to about 16cm apart.



Plant new

strawberries or pin down the runners in September, too

For winter salad leaves add American land cress, winter purslane, endive, along with rocket. You can treat spinach, spring cabbage and oriental greens in the same way for cut-and-come-again crops through winter.

Plant new strawberries or pin down the runners in September. Remember to start on fresh ground every three to four years either all at once or in stages of a third or a quarter each year. Keep young strawberries well watered for good fruit the next year.



Continue to sow

green manures

Continue to sow green manures. Sometimes called the lazy man's compost, they are vigorous, tough, cheap, agricultural crops and need little attention once sown other than digging in at the end. They improve the soil in myriad ways while smothering weeds and protecting the ground from the adverse effects of winter weather.

The choice of green manures narrows each month as we approach the end of the season. This is the last month for sowing winter tare (or vetch). A legume, it is ideal for the bed where the cabbage family will be next year, enriching the ground with greening nitrogen when dug in. If you plan to sow seed next spring, make a note to dig the tare in a month before doing so. Tare releases a chemical that inhibits seed (though not transplants) particularly those of carrots, parsnips and spinach.



For thick cover, try

mixing your green manures with rye grass

For thick cover, try mixing your green manures with Italian rye grass. Being a grass (Poaceae family) rye grass can go anywhere in the rotation and so is ideal mixed in with the particular green manure that is best suited to your soil. It has deep roots that break up clay and it will soak up any left over plant foods which will be released again when the plants are dug in next spring.

Sweet peas are a classic allotment plant and a pleasure to have and to grow. Seed sown in September will make better plants than spring sown ones. Nick the seeds with a sharp knife and germinate them at about 15°C. Once they've emerged, harden them off for the winter ahead. Pot them up when they are about 5cm high and keep them in the cold frame or under cloche cover through winter. They can be planted out in mid spring.

King's Seeds has taken a great interest in sweet peas since the company was started by Ernest William King in 1888. He was never to be seen without a sweet pea in his buttonhole. Visiting them this summer at Kelvedon, Essex, I was knocked for six by the sight and scent of field upon field of sweet peas grown by them for seed. Due to popular

demand, varieties include 'Painted Lady', introduced in 1731, and 'Old Fashioned', grown for scent rather than size.

King's have offered handsome discounts for allotments for 30 years through the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. Recently, Franchi, or Seeds of Italy – now in its seventh generation – are offering good bulk deals too.

Seeds of Italy are rather exceptional as the majority of the seed is not out-posted abroad, as with most seed companies, but 93% of it is grown in Italy regionally. Their discount condition is a first minimum order of £100 (after that no minimum) and they take bulk orders only.

The latest company to offer reductions for allotments is Marshalls Seeds. They are about to launch a new discount scheme from September 6th. This will include gardening clubs with minimum of ten members. They have got around the bulk order condition as accounts will be managed on line. Individual members will be able to log in with their own password, making it 'hassle free' for club secretaries to administer.

## **Ads by Google**

QROPS Spain Explained

Expat? With £100k+ In UK Pensions? Free Guide To QROPS & Expert Advice

Your.QROPSchoices.com/Guardian

La tienda del Riego

El especialista del Riego y Jardín Los mejores precios y consejos

www.mercagarden.com

Vegetable Garden Layout

Free Vegetable Garden Planner. Design Your Vegetable Garden Online

oldhousephotogallery.com/gardening

## **Comments**

3 comments, displaying Oldest first

 Staff

 Contributor

**Comments on this page are now closed.**



**sparclear**

27 August 2010 1:46PM

Lovely article, masses of helpful links and variety names, I shall save it for my screen library. Thanks.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



**allanjenkins**

27 August 2010 3:42PM

Anxious colleague pleading for green tomatoe chutney recipes, please? think he is losing faith

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



**Evainnl**

29 August 2010 11:29AM

Try this one, has gotten rave reviews from many readers:  
<http://www.allotment.org.uk/recipe/906/green-tomato-chutney-recipe/>.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)

Love our articles! Keep 'em coming!

Eva

Comments on this page are now closed.

© 2012 Guardian News and Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.