

theguardian

OBSERVER ORGANIC ALLOTMENT BLOG



Caroline Foley's expert guide to a few things to do for December

The jobs in the garden for the month ahead

Caroline Foley

guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 30 November 2011 12.06 GMT



Time to net the pond to stop leaves falling in

To avoid getting caught out over Christmas, it is as well to protect your plants against frost. Frost is a serial killer. When the soil freezes, roots are no longer able to take up water and plants dehydrate. Frost can also cause cell walls to rupture. Particularly prone to this are plants that catch the morning sun and thaw out too fast or thaw and freeze repeatedly or where wind is also a factor.

Earth up your Brussels sprouts and spring greens against wind rock. To protect them from frost, pile on a thick layer of straw, compost, bracken, well rotted manure or leaves around the base but not touching the stem. If you are planning to keep your carrots, parsnips, swedes, turnips and beetroot in the ground (the best way to store them) mulch them in the same way along with the corms of artichokes and cardoons and any crowns of rhubarb that are not being forced this year.



Containers of vegetables and herbs that will be left outside should be moved to a sheltered spot and buried in the ground and mulched, or raised up from the ground on tiles or some such. If the weather turns bitter, you may need to wrap the pots in bubble wrap or hessian. A layer of grit around the base of plants will encourage free drainage and help to prevent waterlogging and freezing.

Most outdoor crops will benefit from cloche cover of one sort or another. Even the hardiest plants will be less tough to eat given some protection. For small plants, it is easy to rig up your own cloches from recycled plastic milk containers or giant sized plastic cordial or water bottles. Saw off the bottom with a serrated bread knife and leave the top off for ventilation, closing it again on icy nights.



To insulate a row of plants a tent cloche will do the trick. It is just two pieces clear plastic sheet or glass (old windows are ideal) joined together to make a tent shape. These can be secured with hinges or duct tape or you can buy professional clips and ties.

The invention of horticultural fabrics has revolutionized gardening. Even despisers of plastic will admit these new fabrics have advantages in terms of saving work and time. They are hugely versatile and can be draped large plants, stretched over hoops for mini polytunnels or sown into bags as fleece jackets or drawstring 'cosies'.



First on the scene a decade or so ago was the light-as-air gardening fleece. This saw tender plants through winter but tore easily and didn't last more than a season or two. Next came the much tougher Enviromesh – a wondrous invention particularly for those growing brassicas as it keeps out all the flying pests that plague them while allowing water and light to filter through. It provides better air circulation than fleece and gives some protection against frost. Warmer and tougher versions of fleece followed in the form of Envirofleece – the latter is made of soft polyethylene which has the full warmth benefits of fleece a life expectancy of five years.

Double thickness Envirofleece comes into its own as an insulating material for the greenhouse. It works better than bubblewrap as it avoids the problems with condensation.



It would be a good idea for the trading sheds to stock these fabrics by the roll so that plot holders could buy them cheaply by the metre. You can save money by knocking up your own frames and mini polytunnels to be covered by the fabrics. Hoops for mini polytunnels are easily made from old hosepipe or children's plastic hula hoops cut in half.

Before you put down tools for the year, it wouldn't be a bad idea to clean them.

It would be advisable to prune vines to avoid 'bleeding'.

Take hardwood cuttings from the prunings to increase your stock.



Remove any decaying vegetation from the pond. Net it to stop leaves dropping in. Float a ball on the surface to prevent it from icing over.

Plant garlic cloves. They enjoy a period of cold and, conversely, a sunny situation. If your ground is wet clay, drop some sand into the planting hole. Alternatively, grow them in containers. Planted up in an attractive flowerpot, they are generally well received as Christmas presents, particularly as a novelty by people who don't do much gardening themselves.

Ads by Google

[British Expat In Spain?](#)

£100k+ In UK Pensions? Download A Free Guide To QROPS & Expert Advice

[Your.QROPSchoices.com/Guardian](#)

[Solicitors in Benidorm](#)

Speak to a Solicitor Today. First Consultation Free...

[www.myadvocatespain.com/lawyers](#)

[LED Grow Light Sale Now](#)

Best LED Grow Light USA Made 1st LED Grow Light Patent

[LED-Grow-Master.com](#)

Comments

12 comments, displaying Oldest first

 Staff

 Contributor

Comments on this page are now closed.



sparclear

30 November 2011 5:37PM

Great, news of modern alternatives to those brittle glass cloches so dangerous near animals and babies.

Would have welcomed a few pictures of the fabrics you described, and maybe hearing about how gardeners like this or that brand, for this or that vegetable.

Also: memo, when you clean your tools, oil their wooden handles, and if you find any antique ones, inspect them closely for woodworm. A rotten-handled one needn't be written off. Get the metal part separated *not in a bonfire* (fire untempers the steel) and have a carpenter fit the new one. Ash wood is meant to be the best, the springiest.

[Recommend \(2\)](#)

[Responses \(1\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)

Sometimes this is an opportunity for having tools + handles that really suit your own height and strength. A lot of new garden tools are uncomfortably designed & shoddy, sold for short lives on building sites.



stripsidebob

30 November 2011 5:48PM

....a few things to do for December.

Hibernate.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



stripsidebob

30 November 2011 5:49PM

...until the 2nd of January when normality resumes.

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



stripsidebob

30 November 2011 5:52PM

Response to [sparclear](#), 30 November 2011 5:37PM

A lot of new garden tools are uncomfortably designed & shoddy, sold for short lives on building sites.

As my landscaping cousin will attest - he gets through no end of spades and forks (including Bulldog) whilst I have my Grandfathers trusty tools still going strong.

Stainless steel? Nice and shiny but you might as well be digging with plasticine.

[Recommend \(3\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



sparclear

30 November 2011 6:46PM

Crumbs, **ssb**, what has happened to *your make-up*?

MrSp like yr cousin. I'm ashamed to say *I keep a separate set* and am eagle-eyed about builders borrowing things. No. They can Jewson off.

Getting through December: hibernation is allowed, time for reading long and serious books - and bedclothing that smells of sunshine from airing. Did you see the Least Weasel, on The Frozen Planet, curling up in a burrow lined with vole-fur?

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(1\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



stripsidebob

30 November 2011 10:25PM

Response to [sparclear](#), 30 November 2011 6:46PM

It's the new me!

Haven't seen Frozen Planet I'm afraid - up and down like a yo-yo with the kids most evenings - runny noses, wheezing coughs, nightmares about zombies.

Getting through December is about right! Roll on Jan and the new plans for the garden and plot.

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



allanjenkins

1 December 2011 11:42AM



Newsflash! We won the Horticultural Channel Award for Best Blog 2011, love and many thanks to all the contributors, commentators and occasional visitors who make up our community

[Recommend \(2\)](#)

[Responses \(1\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



stripsidebob

1 December 2011 11:47AM

The only tolerable outcome Allan...

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



sparclear

1 December 2011 12:48PM

Response to [allanjenkins, 1 December 2011 11:42AM](#)

Hurrah!

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



nahema

1 December 2011 1:10PM

Hurrah,Hurrah! For once, I feel as if my vote counted!

[Recommend \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



Northernlite

1 December 2011 11:54PM

Im finally turfing out the wasp's nest from my compost bin. And reluctantly pruning roses still in flower.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)



fleurs

2 December 2011 8:39AM

Look online for good deals on fleece, net, etc bought by the roll. Kept out of the sun it should last if you don't use it all or share with fellow gardeners. Same goes for porous pipe etc so get yourself sorted for next year's drought.

It's a good time to plant fruit trees and bushes as well and take hardwood cuttings of your currants when you prune them,they are almost guaranteed to take if you just shove them in some prepared ground.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

[Report](#)

[Share](#)

Comments on this page are now closed.