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BLOG**

## Caroline Foley's expert guide to a few things to do in October

Apples, pears and pruning: gardening jobs for the month ahead



Take advantage of October's apple and pear festivals when choosing a tree

October sees the last of the autumnal fruitfulness, so gather in your crops. If birds are stealing a march on the last of your ripening apples, make sure that they have plenty of treats to distract them. Take off nets on soft fruit to let them get at the pests through winter. If wasps are burrowing in, tie the fruits up into paper bags.

Lift and divide any rhubarb plants over four years old and replant. It will give them a new lease of life. Pinch out yellowing foliage on strawberries and keep young plants watered to help them grow strongly before the cold weather.



Put up grease bands on apple, pear, plum and cherry trees, about 45cm from the ground, to protect them against the winter moth. If there is a stake, make sure that this

is this securely grease-banded too and that there are no tall weeds to act as a sneaky bypass.

The female winter moths can't fly, so will crawl up the trunks to lay their eggs in cracks and crevices for their young to feast on the leaves, blossom and fruitlets when they hatch. This is cleverly timed to coincide with bud burst next spring. Leave the bands on until March and dispose of them off site. Good hygiene has a lot to do with care-free fruit growing



You can prune the blackberries, their hybrids and summer fruiting raspberries (wait till late winter for the autumn ones) as soon as the harvest is over. Cut out the darker canes that have borne fruit this year and tie in new shoots that will bear fruit in the next. Established blackcurrants can be pruned as you harvest. Cut away about a third of the oldest branches right down to the ground aiming for an airy goblet shape .

October is also the month when you will get the widest choice of bare-rooted bushes, canes or trees to be planted any time between November and March. If choosing apples and pears, it is quite fun to take advantage of the apple and pear festivals – along with the cider and perry trials – that are taking place all over the country. While there, you can get advice on pollination times, ultimate size, grafting and rootstocks, disease resistance and length of storage. It is also worth having a talk with your local fruit grower about local varieties or looking at the website of the National Collection at Brogdale Farm, Faversham. If you have an unusual sport, they will even graft it especially for you.



There are two schools of thought on which time is best to plant bare rooted trees. Tradition says November so they can get their roots down for a head start next spring. The others say play safe. Leave it till spring when winter dangers are past, even though there will be less choice then.

Either way, the condition of the soil is more important than the timing. At all costs, avoid planting in cold wet soil and make sure that there is sharp drainage. It is often advised to dig the holes this month ahead of time while the soil is easy to work, though it could make a hazard on an allotment. However, whenever you do it, don't add too much compost or manure. Soil that is too rich in nitrogen will encourage the tree to put out leaves rather than fruit.



It is better to add a dash of bone meal (phosphorus) in the hole to help root development. Bare rooted trees are likely to have been dug up fairly unceremoniously and the fine feeding roots need to recover. Pile the compost or manure on top for a slow feed over the months as the worms take it down.

When considering which soft fruit to buy, do take a look through the catalogues. New to tempt you, is the primo cane blackberry 'Reuben', which produces fruit in its first year on this season's canes and so has the potential to produce two crops each year.

Reintroduced is an old French variety pink currant, 'Gloire de Sablon'. Coral pink, it is as pretty as a string of pearls.



The Gogi Berry, featured as the latest celebrity super food, is expensive to buy in the shops, but dead easy to grows from a young plant. Others that fall into this category are the cranberry and blueberry. They are both ornamental, generous fruiters and no trouble at all if grown in containers with acid soil and enough moisture.

For a blueberry-like fruit that doesn't need acid soil, try the honeyberry, or the edible honeysuckle, Lonicera caerulea. It is widely grown in China, Japan and Siberia but is a new introduction here. Wait until spring and buy two to cross-pollinate.



Though by no means new, my personal favourite of the more unusual soft fruits is the Japanese wineberry. Closely related to the raspberry, it is a plant with character. It has arching stems covered in golden prickles like fur and starry flowers in pointed calyxes. The fruits are slightly tart, full of flavour and blood-orange. They slot in neatly between the summer and autumn raspberries as they fruit in August.

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**sparclear**

1 October 2011 7:47AM

Useful article, shall clip this as your work always full of information, thanks Caroline.

People with a wood-only fireplace, bonfire site or woodburning stoves - you might like to save the [pure, only] wood ash,= fruit trees' favourite potash.

We save this task till springtime and only thinly sprinkle on areas beneath plants. The rain rinses it down into topsoil. Alys wrote an article answering someone's questions about using ash a while ago.

Other pieces of wisdom I absorbed from gardeners long ago, keep the area beneath apple trees 'nice and green' if you want rosy-coloured fruit, and also young trees shouldn't set fruits in their first few seasons (or the branches will grow bowed and feeble). What you want is to be establishing the right stout shaped trees first. It surprises me how often I see gardeners have forgotten about this.

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1 October 2011 10:46AM

Lots to think about here. I am lucky to have an allotment here in Leeds and Autumn rasps are one of my favourites. Are any of the soft fruits mentioned suited to a partially shaded site?

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1 October 2011 3:31PM

*try the honeyberry, or the edible honeysuckle, Lonicera caerulea. It is widely grown in China, Japan and Siberia but is a new introduction here. Wait until spring and buy two to cross-pollinate.*

For cross-pollination, you need two different varieties. For more info on growin Edible Blue Honeysuckle, see <http://ediblebluehoneysuckle.wordpress.com/>

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