

Gardening Tips From NGS Gardeners

My gardening tip as always is, spend a little time in your garden everyday if possible. Sometimes do some gardening, at other times just sit & enjoy your garden.

George Stevenson Cambs.

Always make paths 50% wider than you think they should be so that you can allow plants to soften the edges.

If you don't have time or energy to remove weeds just take off the flowers and seed heads. Put a seat in your garden to enjoy the sights, scents, sounds and colours throughout the year.

Pauline and Robert Little, Derbys.

Some borderline herbaceous perennials (agapanthus, phygelius, fuchsia, arum lily etc) will over-winter more successfully if covered with a mulch, and dead leaves work well. To prevent them blowing all over the garden, up-end a wire hanging basket over your mound of leaves. Older designs are heavy enough to stay in place on their own, but a tent peg or piece of bent wire will anchor them, if not.

Gill and David Mullin

The Autumn is approaching which can be a very beautiful time. Sedums and Asters will be in flower so there will be lots of butterflies around. Keep dead-heading your roses and they will continue flowering right through to November. Ornamental grasses really come into their own now and they begin to change colour as the cooler mornings and nights approach. Now is a good time to go on Autumnal walks, native Heathers will be in flower, Acers will be changing colour and you make the most of the Autumnal sun.

Lorraine Rudd

Lifting Banana plants for over-wintering indoors. Cut off the large leaves and then dig up the plant. Wrap the root ball in a dustbin sack, tying it around the stem. Hang the plant, upside down in a shed for three days. This allows the excess moisture to drain out of the stems and leaf axils.

BE WARNED - a lot of moisture will drain out, so position a large container beneath the stem whilst hanging

Then pot into a trug tub and keep frost-free and on the dry side. This prevents bacterial and fungal diseases from attacking the plant in the spring. Only start watering when the plant shows signs of

growth.

Ray Spencer, Court View, Essex

Keep cutting dahlias for a great indoor display and lots more flowers outside too.

Deborah Nagan

Clean out all gutters and pipes on water butts before winter sets in. Put a stainless steel brillo pad into the downpipe to stop the ingress of autumn leaves and debris. Keep covered to help prevent the formation of algae. Raise off the ground for accessibility before they become too heavy to move.

Sarah Bacon 11, Highgrove, Derbys.

Garden little and often especially if starting out or less able. That way it's a pleasure not a pain and it's amazing how much can be done in an hour or so.

Jennie Corke, The Maltinghouse, Cambs.

Spend half an hour a day walking around your garden with a small bucket and a pair of secateurs or scissors. Nip off any flowered shoots to tidy and encourage new flowering buds to form. Especially relevant for perennials such as Penstemons, Phlox and Campanulas. Your garden will thank you

Carol Darling, Frythe Barn, Suffolk.

Make sure there is something in your garden to cheer you up all year round, even if it is only a window box or large pot. As a 91-year old, living alone, I have learnt that having plants that depend on your care is a great motivation to get out and do something positive. The reward your plants give you for your effort will really raise your spirits, a very important factor of wellbeing

Gwladys Tonge, 19, Highfield Road, Bucks.

If you have a problem or feel depressed spend an hour in your garden and everything will look much better when you go indoors.

Lady Nourse, Dullingham House, Cambs.

Cut back to within 2 inches of the ground straggling oriental poppies once they have flowered (leaves and all!) to produce a neat rosette of leaves and a second crop of flowers in late summer.

Lyn Spencer –Mills, Hoopers Holding, Somerset

Weave colourful supports for your herbaceous plants. Keep your Cornus and Salix stems from when you coppice. Leave them outside for about 3 weeks, when you reckon they will not root! Kept too long they go brittle and will not stay woven. I use 3 or 4 pairs pushed into the ground per plant. I weave the opposing pairs together, rather the same as rope is made, and each end is secured by twisting it back up between the woven stems. When using Cornus stems I put a horizontal band of string around. When using Salix I weave the branches to make a cage. They last for one year.

Helen Marsden, The Old Priory, East Yorks.

Use ground cover plants to cut down on weeding.

Susan Tabor, Trunkwell, Berks.

Plant Mina Lobata (Spanish Flag) in June or even July, if you can get hold of any, as they will climb up through dying clematis on trellis etc. and give one red & white, jolly bean type flowers, through Sept, Oct and even Nov until frosts come, and brighten any Autumn garden.

Sandra Clapham, 69, Gloucester Crescent, London. NW1

- 1. Put the kettle on**
- 2. Whilst boiling, walk round garden and make list of tasks - about 6.**
- 3. While enjoying cup of tea, make schedule of jobs and time them - not more that 20 minutes at each task - e.g.;**
 - 10 - 10.15 - edge law**
 - 10.15 - 10.30 - weed iris border**
 - 10.30 - 10.45 - water glasshouse**
 - 10.45 - 11.00 - feed hens**
 - 11.15 - 11.30 plant leeks**
 - 10.30 - 10.45 sharpen chainsaw.**
 - 10.45 - 11.15 coffee**
 - 11.15 - 11.30 weed irises bed etc. etc.**

When each task is completed sign it off and get someone else to inspect and countersign.

I am a former cancer sufferer and my days were filled with interest and excitement as I moved from one job to another, I was never bored, nothing was a chore and every night I retired to bed looking forward to the positivities of the following day.

Phillip B Hunt, St Peters Park, Flintshire

With all the deadheading/cutting back and weeding-don't forget to take time if you can, to

wander around and enjoy your garden too. I particularly love finding plant associations which I hadn't planned but work wonderfully well... plants definitely have a mind of their own I find!

Su Foley, Slindon Gardens, West Sussex

Be sure to take a walk around your garden and enjoy taking a specific look at plants and views especially after a hard days work. Appreciate what you see and the results of your labours without a trowel in your hand!

Barbara Saveall, Damstead, Derbys.

When choosing a plant for your garden remember that flowers are a fleeting bonus. Pick plants for how they will look for the rest of the year when not in flower. No plant has ever read the books. Nature is very clever, observe and listen to your garden and you will be surprised at what you can get to grow.

Barbara Saveall, Damstead, Derbys.

Scarify, aerate and top-dress the lawn in September and you will reap dividends next year.

Get your favourite bulbs planted but leave tulip bulbs until early December and avoid the dreaded tulip virus.

Johnnie Amos - BBC Producer

Before you go on holiday 'Live-head' all your late summer flowers (e.g. dahlias, cosmos, helianthus) & water well. Wonderful flowers on your return!

Elizabeth Walker, Willows, Hants

If you have young summer flowering plants of any kind, you are trying to establish, don't let them put all their energy into flowering. Remove most of the flower buds before they develop so the plant can put its resources into forming a good solid root system.

Steve Whitehead, Colby Woodland Garden, Pembrokes.

Autumn has gone out of fashion! Now we can buy plants in flower all the year round, gardeners seem to have forgotten how valuable it is to 'get things settled in' before the winter. As well as the thrill of putting in spring bulbs, many hardy perennials and shrubs benefit from getting their toes in before November. The ground is still warm, and they will welcome autumn rain. Plants put out in September and early October will give twice the show and have really sturdy growth the next year.

Don't panic about pruning! Unless you are planning a really radical cut-back, most shrubs will

tolerate being trimmed almost any time, in spite of the mountains of special instructions published. Do it when you see it needs doing - otherwise it will be put off yet again. As a rule of thumb, after flowering is good!

Ro FitzGerald, Court House

Keep deadheading plants in the garden, They will produce more and you will get flowers into the early winter.

Kate Tattersall, Alexandra Park Gardens, London N22

To speed up the composting of leaves (and make better leaf mould), those gathered from borders and hard surfaces should be put through a shredder to break them down a little. Leaves on lawns can be collected with the lawnmower, which will do a similar job.

Penny Eves, Langdale House, Northants.

Orange and purple-flowering plants together make a very bright and cheerful display and raise the spirits.

Cosmos is easy to grow from seed, very tolerant of drought and produces cheerful large flowers sometimes through to December.

Jennie Street, Sheffield

Cut back hard repeat flowerers like Alchemilla Mollis and Geraniums to promote a new flush of growth.

Check that ignored weeds are not setting seed - remove to prevent a host of offspring appearing next year.

Karen Guthrie, Lawson Park, Cumbria

When taking cuttings, insert as usual in seed and cutting compost and then put the pot in a plastic bag in which you have bought grapes at a supermarket; they have some air holes and you can unzip them gradually as the cuttings grow.

Sue Bannister, Carters Yard, Sibford Saver, Oxon.

Whenever you consider that your roses and flowering plants and shrubs can do with a real boost! Add a good pinch of Epsom Salts (available from chemists and garden centres) and water it in. Your flowers will get a real boost and the colours will be more vibrant - it is a fantastic tonic.

Deborah Pulvernis, 89, Willifield Way, London NW11

Slugs and snails Get them early!

I use the common slug bait pellets around particularly the Hostas (applied liberally) This year I did it earlier than usual as the plants were just coming into leaf and it has been very successful

Comfrey feed

The leaves of comfrey when stored in water for a few months makes an excellent general purpose feed for perennials and veg.

Dead Heading

Almost all flowering plants benefit from early removal of dead flowers. It really is worth the effort. With roses and perennial geraniums in particular a second flush in August awaits...

This year for the sake of tidiness, I pruned my 80yr old Wisteria straight after it had flowered - and it's now starting to flower again! (July 19th)

Martin Gardner, Hilltop , Cheshire

Don't "put the garden to bed" meaning don't cut back stems and seed heads -leave them for the birds and to make a different but attractive display through the winter. Tie paper bags around seed heads as the plants dry out to collect seeds to sow and share next year. Store them in labelled envelopes in a cool dry place.

Jean Richards, Brooks End, Blewbury, Oxon.

Keep hoeing each week. If you hoe every week irrespective of weed germination, you will always have a tidy, weed free garden and it is good exercise for arms, upper body.

Richard and Daphne Preston, Primrose Cottage, Oxon.

Choose several jobs at the same time, so that one can change work positions every 20 minutes .The overall effect is reduced stress to the body.

Anke Way, Southover, Kent.

Gather fallen leaves and put them in one compost heap, exclusively devoted to leaves, next year one has pure leaf mould. No need to turn, or add any chemicals. Use as mulch on borders.

David Way, Southover, Kent

Buy 3/4 small ivy plants and plant 4' apart in a planter. Weave trailing ends together. Soon you will have a sculptured garland. Trim twice a year with shears.

Caroline Fox, 47, Bournehall Avenue, Herts. (Cancer survivor)

A lot of fabulous lilies are up to -25 degree frost tolerant. Plant loads for perfume and sheer

blousiness.

Caroline Fox, 47, Bournehall Avenue, Herts.

Create your dream garden. Then direct all and sundry!! Get used to not doing and let others build your beautiful garden for you.

Caroline Fox, 47, Bournehall Avenue, Herts.

Weeding is extremely theraputic. I know it is not necessarily a "fun thing" but it fulfils two purposes; removes weeds and anxiety.

Ann Burnham, The Old Rectory, Devon

August is often a month when many gardeners find that their interest and energy flags. Don't despair, enthusiasm soon returns. Do a bit of deadheading every day. By removing the dead or seeding stems, those in flower show up to better advantage. It is gentle but worthwhile exercise

Make time to sit and just look at the garden. As well as enjoying the peace of the moment, you will find that it the time that inspiration and ideas are most likely to strike.

Richard Bird, Rogers Rough, Kent

If you have a damp area at the front of a border plant *Darmera peltata* for large showy leaves and great autumn colour.

Fenja Anderson, Mariners, Berks.

Winter is the time to appreciate the bare bones of your garden and assess your site for any new design features or planting areas.

Fenja Anderson, Mariners, Berks.

Deadheading roses is a therapeutic pastime and it keeps new buds developing and the roses looking at their best.

Fenja Anderson, Mariners, Berks.

Visit the Garden Centre every month and buy two plants in flower every time. You'll will finish up with an all-season's garden.

Andrew Radgick, Devonia, Berks.

Go gathering seeds.....Wait for a dry day, and check that the seeds are really ready to harvest – pods should be on the point of bursting, fruit ripe, and cases starting to split. Finish drying seed by laying them out on newspapers, then store in the fridge in a plastic box with silica gel, until you're ready to sow. There is *nothing* more satisfying than sowing and growing a plant from your own seed!

Cat Saunders, Overbecks, Devon.

To preserve your BACK, don't do ANY job for more than 20 minutes. Applies to all seasons!

Susie Dean, Lincs.

Our garden never uses chemicals and we are proud of our wildlife. Here is a tip for mildew. One part of milk to 10 parts of water - mix and spray. Works great.

Another for snails and slugs. Use coffee grounds and banana skins- sprinkle and deposit around plants.

Marie Anand, Peace Haven, Herts.

I find digging with a small headed spade with a thin, slightly rounded stainless steel blade minimises strain on my back and joints and allows me to work for longer without tiring.

My lightweight tree planting spade with its long pointed blade gives me extra reach, better control & manoeuvrability when working in tightly packed planting areas & minimises damage to existing plants.

Jackie Michelmores, The Lookout, Devon

Collect seed heads from poppies and put them in a paper bag, carefully labelled with the description and colour. Keep the seed dry. Next spring just shake the seeds where you want your poppies to grow. You can be sure of a great show, especially in dry areas of the garden. Wonderful with grasses and alliums.

Susan Copeland, Wickets, Essex

Start to thinking about annual seeds for next year, especially nigella and poppies and harvest the seed heads. Hang them upside down in a paper bag to dry and collect. If you pick longer stalks, you have lovely dried seed heads for Christmas flower arrangements too.

Trish Swain, 2, Kingswood Cottages, Bucks.

Before planting tulips, gently toss the bulbs in a very little methylated spirits to prevent squirrels

from digging them up. Do not soak.

Mrs Ruth Levy, 5, Frognaal Gardens, London, NW3

Wilkinson Sword SWOE is the best tool imaginable - light, long handled, skims through soil beautifully. Always hoe when there are no weeds and that way you never get any.

I group colours very carefully in my garden and it is what visitors love most so try apricot, peach and burgundy in a bed or a bed of intense purple, dark blue burgundy and shocking pink mixed with lime green.

Use herbs in mixed sunny borders and not just a herb border- rue, hyssop, thyme, sage, fennel and savory all mix brilliantly with perennials.

Sue Alexander

Pop along to your builder's merchant and buy a few road pins for about £3 each. They're tempered steel, and are used to drive into road surfaces to support coloured warning tapes – you'll see them nearly every day near road works. They make outstanding garden stakes which are virtually invisible. I bet you go back to buy more!

Purchase some Liberon finishing oil as sold for wooden kitchen worktops. It says it's for internal use, but I've used it outside for several years now. Although claimed to be oil, it actually dries more like a varnish, in about 4 hours. I now buy it in bulk because a quick wipe will restore the shine to painted metal garden furniture, rust protect iron objects kept outside, keep water out of wood – sheds, gates, furniture, etc. The list of uses goes on and on. But be warned, drips or splashes are impossible to remove once they've dried – even from glass or paving!

Mike Fletcher, Lavender Garden, N. Yorks.

Nothing is better for your beds than not stepping on them to reach a weed - so weed using a hoe or kneel and stretch to weed or bend and stretch to reach your weeds. If you are doing a major task stand on a plank! You will feel you have been to a gym at the end of the day.

Griselda Kerr, The Dower House, Derbys.

Simple willow cloches with micro mesh covers sewn to fit, protect seedlings from the birds, young lettuces from the sun and the cabbage white butter flies look very frustrated!

Susan Dobbs, Salterns Cottage, Isle of Wight

Never wander round your garden without your secateurs; You never know what might need pruning/deadheading!

Barbara Simmons, Primrose Farm, Cornwall

Extend the life of your Rose Beds by interplanting with tulips which flower while the roses are just sticks.

Beverly Tonkin, Stallcourt Mews, Vale of Glamorgan

Autumn is the best time for planting Rhododendrons. Apply superphosphate to toughen up your plants for winter and to make new roots.

Spread autumn leaves around your plants as the best mulch possible.

David Millais, Crosswater Farm, Surrey

A few slug resistant hosta blues are 'Blue Mammoth', 'Blue Plate Special', 'Blue Shadows', 'Krossa Regal', and 'Reptillian'.

Heavier and tougher leaves are generally characteristic of hosta that are slug resistant. 'Sum and Substance', is a gold leafed hosta that will brighten up any shady garden area. This large hosta will grow up to 36"h and up to 80"w.

The wide, heavily textured, bright chartreuse leaves may change to a golden green in brighter light. Lavender flowers bloom late in the season.

Rod Burn, Tilford Cottage Garden, Surrey

To water your greenhouse and to use rain water more effectively set up a watering system from your water butt so that the water always flows when it rains. That way the butt never fills up and overflows but the watering is done! I use a hose pipe and when it reaches the planting beds I pierce holes using a skewer and put a water stop on the end. It works a treat.

Emma Butler, Meareway Farm, Somerset

Paint all wooden structures (fences, sheds, pergolas etc.) dark green (Forest Green). It makes them almost disappear and surprisingly you do not "lose" green plants against a dark green background.

Always ask for National Gardening Vouchers as a Christmas Gift (why not birthday as well). It makes life easier for your friends and relatives, gives you a massive choice of items to buy and there may be enough to get that really expensive plant or tree you have always wanted but never dared to buy.

Peter Barrett, 9, Tannsfield Drive, Herts.

To protect young plants/shrubs/trees from spring frost collect old umbrellas – all sizes. Take off

the handles, which gives you a sharp end to push into the ground, and you have the perfect cover for quick overnight use in spring. The golf sized umbrellas even cover young trees quite effectively. They are easily stored when furled up.

Use silver sand to mark where dormant bulbs are – both old and new plantings. You can then easily see where they are and it helps you not to spear the bulbs when tidying up. Use 3mm grit to lighten clay soil. Clear the weeds and simply put at least an inch of grit on top of the soil – the worms will take it in. It also helps to stop the soil cracking. A cold frame in the shade is ideal for placing newly potted seedlings but do remember to move them on to whatever type of situation they need after about 2 – 3 weeks.

Use pot marigolds (calendula) and nasturtiums amongst your vegetables – they help bring in beneficial insects and you can also eat both the flowers and leaves of nasturtiums, and the flowers of the marigolds.

If you take over a really weed infested patch and can leave it fallow for about 18 months – do an initial clearance and then cover the whole patch with as much dung as you can lay your hands on. Cover the whole with old carpets and leave for 18 months. Most of the weeds will have given up by then.

If you do not have a greenhouse or other cover to put plants in for the winter and have young plants/shrubs in pots, plunge them in the vegetable garden, pot and all – they are less likely to dry out and do not have as much surface area for frost to penetrate.

Mike and Edna Squires, 1 Feebers Cottage, Devon.

Dead heading Buddleia is really worthwhile. Cutting off the spent flowers prolongs the flowering period by weeks.

Edwina Robarts, Bromley Hall, Herts.

If you keep the edges of the lawn immaculate no-one will notice any other perfections in your garden. It is like having a good hair-cut!

Sue Phipps, 17 Crescent Lane SW4, London

If there's work to be done in the garden and you don't really feel like it, make the effort to do it. You will always feel better for it.

Janet Neale, Westering, Warwicks.

If you need to cut back a very thorny rose or other shrub, start by just cutting off small pieces from

the end of each branch. Then you can work your way in gradually without having to put your arms down inside the shrub and getting caught on the thorns.

Valerie Collins, 59, Church Lane, Notts.

After the initial flowering flush from perennials such as hardy geraniums and astrantias take the plunge and cut them right down to the ground. This tidies up the old foliage, gets rid of dead flowers and encourages new growth and a further crop of flowers. If you remember to water them in dry weather they will respond quickly and can flower again in 3-4 weeks.

Karen Pollard, Little Torrington Gardens, Devon

To plant up a container with winter flowering things that need little maintenance but once done will give a lot of pleasure in a season that can seem endless. Bulbs can be planted under winter pansies; erica etc and they will soon shoot through. New growth is always uplifting.

Helen Goodchild, 6, Ashton Close, Somerset.

Store your trowel, hand fork etc in a hanging wall pot - the type with a flat back, curved front. a hole at the base and a hole to hang it on the wall. You can position it at just the right height on a fence or wall for you to reach for your tools with ease. If kept outside, any rainwater will drain through the hole at the bottom.

Annette Wood, Emsworth Gardens, Hants

Collect ripe seeds from your flowers in the summer and autumn to grow next year. Suitable and easy ones to collect and grow are impatiens (busy lizzie), nicotianas, salvias, cosmos, malvas, violas, aquilegias, nigella, sweet peas and foxgloves. Store them overwinter in an envelope ready for next year when you will have the freshest and the best seeds available!

Annette Wood, Emsworth Gardens, Hants

Why not consider gardening as a flexible second career? If you have a very small garden try and get an allotment.

Peter Tomson FRCGP, The Abbots House Garden, Herts.

There is always one plant that is at its best on any given day. Seek it out, look at it very closely and really enjoy it.

Daphne Foulsham, Vale End, Albury, Surrey.

Garden for all seasons by using good foliage. Flowers only last a few weeks but foliage can carry you through the whole season. Use strong colours for high Summer and Autumn to keep the garden looking fresh

Katie Lukas, Stone House, Cheltenham, Glos.

In clay soil we have found that cannas grow well [in good potting compost enriched with horse manure] in pots rather than free planting in beds. This also applies to exotic gingers which can be grown outside during the summer months.

Alan and Wilma Lloyd –Smith, Potmans Heath, Kent.

If you suffer from your rose blooms "balling" because of rainfall just as they are about to open, pop a paper bag inside a small freezer bag and then put this loosely over the rose buds when heavy rain is forecast. The paper bag stops the plastic one from clinging to the rose(s) - which would be likely to cause mould and physical damage when removing them - and the plastic one stops the wet getting to the bud(s).

Remember to tie up new shoots of roses every day or two: whilst the weather remains mild growth will be rapid but the new shoots stay brittle for some time and autumn winds will whip the growing tips off in seconds.

Dave Darwent, 12, Ansell Road, Derbys.

Mulch as much as possible - feed the soil not the plants. After all your hard work try and have some time to sit back and enjoy.

Ann Montier, The Oast House, East Sussex.

Dead-head roses and sweet peas daily.

Barbara Hill, The Grove, Oxon.

Scatter slug pellets (lightly) around your garden in Feb/March before you plant out any plants. That way you kill slugs as they come out of their winter dormancy and stop them laying eggs.

This is much more successful than placing handfuls of pellets around individual plants once they are in the ground.

Geoff Hoyle, 39, Osborne Street, Cheshire.

Tomato plants and containers benefit from a liquid feed- Comfrey is recommended but when I cut down my stinging nettles in late spring I put them in an old water butt and add water to cover. After about 4 weeks I strain off the liquid and bottle it. I dilute it about 10 to 1 (weak tea colour) and use as a feed. The smell is pretty foul but it seems to do the trick.

Mrs Lynda Tucker, Hindringham Hall, Norfolk.

Just as hostas start to nose out of the ground, make a 3 inch wide by 3 inch high ring of wood ash from your wood burner around the crown of each plant to deter slugs and snails. Works well for me, the young leaves have a chance to toughen up before the slugs get to them.

Helen Brown, Little Ash Bungalow, Devon.

Use fishing line as an invisible climbing frame for annual climbers and clematis.

Helen Brown, Little Ash Bungalow, Devon.

Some years ago, I “slipped a disc” at the base of my lumbar spine. I was signed off work by my GP, but was unhappy that there appeared to be no treatment, other than the knife. I managed to obtain some guidelines from a tame physiotherapist. His key exercise was to lie on the floor, on my front, raised up on my elbows and then stretch. This, in the house, is a very boring thing to do. However, gently crawling around the garden flower beds, weeding and tidying the edges as I went made the exercise almost a pleasure, made the garden look so much neater and got me back on my feet in half the time predicted by my GP. Highly recommended, but pick dry days!

Doug Smith, Meon Orchard, Hants.

If you have some special pelargoniums you wish to overwinter and they are in garden pots. Take some cuttings now and slip them around the edge of the pot. You will find they have rooted by the time you need to bring them in and you can pot up the small cuttings to overwinter instead of the large pot.

Sue Chartier, Ashley, Kent.

To promote an additional flush of plump rose blooms on otherwise 'shy' roses, prune the spent flowering branches immediately then feed and water the rose well until the new buds have formed!

Claire De Sousa Barry, 1, Dering Road, Kent

Take photos of favourite plants. To enjoy on days you're feeling unwell. And of views. To study, with plans for the future in mind.

Christine Russell, The Shute, Isle of Wight

The third week in August is traditionally a good time for sowing grass seed. With a changing climate it can be a good idea to treat the calendar with caution and be prepared to sow grass seed

whenever the long term forecast predicts showery weather ahead.

Callum Johnston, Tanyllen, Powys

"Compost and comfrey"

Early this summer a huge healthy plant took over my herbaceous border. it grew taller, faster than any other plant, and flowered profusely attracting hoards of bees. then we had gales and it sprawled all over my choice delphiniums. Sadly it had to go.....not before, however, I discovered it was comfrey.

I cut it down and immersed it in a metal dustbin filled with water. Within days the "liquid " acquired a very unpleasant odour. I diluted it ...with no scientific basis, and began feeding my container plants.

They thrived as the comfrey had thrived in my border. at no cost. Another friend has since told me to add any other green waste like weeds, which I don't want to put on the compost heap. My plants have never looked better. My garden has been my teacher. As I approach my seventh decade, I have learned that what is kept well, keeps well.

Susan Bennett and Earl Hyde, 5, St Regis Close, Alexandra Park Road, London

Take cuttings of your favourite perennials just in case a hard winter kills of some of your plants.

Marjorie Harris, 48, Erskine Hall, NW11, London

Mosquitoes also can't stand the smell of fabric softener sheets: pin a used one on your clothes when gardening.

Rebecca Wilmshurst, Choumert Square, SE15, London.

Stains on plastic garden furniture are a pain – but apply a paste made with bicarbonate of soda and water, leave for a couple of minutes and wipe away!

Rebecca Wilmshurst, Choumert Square, SE15, London.

Tea leaves and tea bags Roses love them! They also make good `starter' beds for seeds.

Rebecca Wilmshurst, Choumert Square, SE15, London.

I have a lot of raised beds in my garden, for people who are elderly, or recovering from surgery, sitting on a chair, collecting seed heads, weeding, deadheading makes life more easy.

Wendy Liddle

Just do what you can, i.e. if you can only sit and dead head the rose by you do this and ignore the rest, just tick this as a good job done. I had to adopt a similar approach when I wasn't at all mobile.

Ingram Lloyd, The Old Forge, Sulgrave, Oxon.

As soon as your Delphiniums have flowered and are 'going over', cut off at the base of the flower spire, leaving the leafy growth of the plant (3.5ft from the ground) this will draw the energy back down to the roots of the plant promoting stronger growth and more successful flowering next year. At the same time sprinkle a handful (at the base of each crown) of a high nutrient feed (Vitax Q4). At the end of the season when it's time to cut down your borders, cut Delphiniums to 6-8 inches from the base, so you don't damage the crowns over winter.

Fred Waters, Kirtling Tower, Cambs.

When you have the chance to cut down any tree or large shrub or just by gathering some old pieces of branches why not create a piece of 'land art' by placing your pieces in a design of your own. It will not only be your own art creation but it can also be a home for wildlife as well as possible displays of fungi for another autumn.

Richard Todd, Head Gardener, Anglesey Abbey Gardens, Cambs.

Vary the routine – a bit of hoeing, a bit of pruning, a bit of mowing. etc It works for arthritis – it probably works for other ailments too!

John Hinde, NGS Trustee, Cheshire and Wirral

Try to start a collection of a plant you particularly like. This gives you something special to search for when you are visiting different gardens and garden centres or watch out for in articles.

Trudie Willis, Priors Oak, Suffolk.

Plant perennials in blocks of three for more impact and to avoid spottiness. Stick to a complementary colour palette. It focuses the mind and is pleasing on the eye. Repeat planting makes a garden gel together. Work on one area at a time rather than scattering your concentration.

Liz Pashley, Aston Gardens, South Yorkshire

Collect fallen leaves using lawn rake and hand held collectors. Don't burn but save and these will rot down to form a great top dressing for flower beds.

Celia Hargrave, Trench Hill, Glos

Plant 6-8 tulip bulbs in reasonable sized plant pots and sink into the ground between perennials or shrubs. When flowering is over in Spring/early summer, simply lift the pot and store elsewhere to allow the bulbs to die down naturally.

Paul and Carol Speakman, Gilgarran Gardens, Cumbria

After removing Hellebore leaves in Nov/Dec plant snowdrops in the space left. They will then flower every year and the new leaves of the Hellebores as they come in the spring cover the dying leaves of the snowdrops.

Sue Eden, Mitchmere Farm, West Sussex

Don't cut down all the plants in your flower beds in the autumn, leave some of them for winter seed heads and to provide homes for beneficial insects during the cold season. Ladybirds use hollow stems for a nest and will help eat next year's aphids!

Pauline Hansler, Home Farm Cottage

Plant bulbs of winter aconite *Eranthis hyemalis*, (bright yellow) and *Cyclamen coum* (bright pink) this autumn under e.g. a tree, or rose bush for a real treat to look forward to in January/Feb.

Linda Schofield, Schofields, Glos.

Plant the hardy bulb *Lilium regale* in terracotta pots near a seating area and enjoy a stunning and beautifully scented display next Summer.

Plant *Tulipa* 'Spring Green' amongst *Hostas* for a simple but beautiful combination in borders or containers.

Plant out purple Sweet Rocket *Hesperis matronalis* (grown from seed earlier in the year or purchased from the garden centre) with bulbs of *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple sensation' for a scented and eye-catching border in early Summer next year.

Kate White, National Trust Lytes Cary Manor, Somerset.

When you are developing a new garden, buy plants every month and you'll always have something interesting or colourful all year round.

Jane Gibson, Charton Tree Cottage, Devon.

When planting bulbs for naturalising like *Narcissus* `throw` them gently on the ground in groups for a more natural effect. It is easier to plant tulips after bedding out biennials like wallflowers - so that you do no damage to the bulb and you can see where to place the plants.

Liz Tite, Field Cottage, Yorks.

Start scarifying, aerating and reseeding your lawn before the ground temperature drops so the grass has time to put on some growth before winter.

Claire Read, Hestercombe Gardens, Somerset.

Cut back and feed Peonies.

Claire Read, Hestercombe Gardens, Somerset.

As you cut back perennials and take out their stakes make a note for next year of what you staked- it will make it so much easier in the spring if you have something to jog your memory.

Claire Read, Hestercombe Gardens, Somerset.

Don't be in too much of a hurry to tidy the garden before winter. The seed heads provide lovely winter interest particularly when frosted, but they also provide an important food source for winter wildlife. Hollow stems also provide overwintering sites for beneficial insects too. So leave some of these things till the early spring.

Marion Stainton, The Brooks, Herefords.

In the vegetable garden cover areas likely to be bare earth over winter with mypex to keep seed infestations down. In the spring the dark colour also helps the ground warm up ready for planting.

Marion Stainton, The Brooks, Herefords.

This is the time for seed collecting. Choose a dry day and gather and store the seeds of anything you may wish to propagate in paper bags, NOT plastic, naming the bags with a black felt pen. Store the open bags in a mouse proof container. Some of your seeds will need to be sown before the winter. The internet will tell you which ones.

Lindel Williams, Marle Place, Kent.

Take rose cuttings now. You will need about 30cm of this year's growth and you plant two thirds below the surface. Tie a label on each cutting. Wait two years and you will have a new plant on its own roots.

Lindel Williams, Marle Place, Kent.

Use a wire rake to remove moss and dead grass from your lawn, which has built up due to frequent mowing in the summer. This action will promote growth and prepare your lawn for the cooler months ahead.

Anthony Boulding, Hampton Court Palace, London.

Empty out the greenhouse and clean thoroughly in readiness for the plants coming in for the winter. If you want to move or divide perennials do it now whilst the ground is warm and the roots can settle before winter.

Hon Mrs PN Turner, Parsonage House, Essex.

Autumn is a great time to make any planting changes you have been planning this summer. With the dry springs we have had of late, by planting in the autumn your plants will have a good opportunity for their roots to make good contact with the damp soil around them. Plan, plant, enjoy!

Andrew Myson, Head Gardener, Trinity Hall, Cambs.

Take your geranium cuttings in the last week of August.

Chris Jones, The Chalet, Somerset

Do undertake some gentle stretching exercises before gardening.

Mr & Mrs Blower, Glangwili Lodges, Carmarthen

Think about how your garden looked over the last year and while you can still remember what things were like, move or split plants to improve next year's composition.

Louise Bateman, Cedarwood, Notts.

The lawns at Goldsborough Hall are renowned for their lush green quality. In order to keep them ship shape, in Autumn we remove fallen leaves regularly and don't wait until all the leaves have dropped or the lawn is fighting under a blanket of wet and rotting leaves! We also feed the lawn at this time of year to ensure that it remains in good condition in the run up to Winter. If there are any bare patches, it is also a good time to sow grass seed.

Clare Oglesby, Goldsborough Hall, North Yorkshire.

**Think about what you want from your garden i.e. year round interest, dog friendly, child friendly - and do your research! It will save time and money in the long run.
NEVER impulse buy**

Think outside the box - slow growing plants can live quite happily in a tub or large pot as long as you feed them.

Do what makes you happy - this is YOUR garden Don't follow fashion - choose plants for you

Rachael & Steve Hemsley, 205 Herbert Avenue, Dorset

When I feel too 'down' for any gardening I try to think of one small gardening task that I could get myself to do that will take only five. Watering some pots or deadheading a few roses will take no longer than that. Before I know it I have been in the garden for two or three hours, the grass is cut - and edged - plants have been fed and many weeds despatched. And I am already making a list of what I will do out there tomorrow. My 'down' mood has miraculously disappeared.

Kay Thomson, 66 Muswell Avenue, N10, London

Peg down bubble wrap over hedychioms and cannas, once frosts have killed off the top growth, and cover that with bracken or old clematis shoots to hide it, and they will overwinter outside successfully.

Mike Adams, Coombe Cottage, Dorset

Plant what you enjoy (either eating or looking at) wait in anticipation for a result eg Dieramas take 4-5 years to flower from seed! Gardening should be a joy, not a chore.

Penstemon cuttings taken in September will flower the following year. Roscoea go to ground in the autumn and do not emerge until June the following year. I tell people they are Himalayan and wait until the snows have melted!

Read up about a plant, before taking the plunge and buying it, particularly if it is not known to you to avoid expensive disappointment. Beware plants which grow easily from root cuttings : Japanese Anemone and Acanthus mollis spring to mind - try to move them, leave a piece of root in the ground and they will reappear in their original position the following year.

Peter and Jill Pitman, Mews Cottage, PORTLAND Dorset

Holder of a National Collection of hybrid and species Penstemon, together with a large collection (100+) Agapanthus and many Himalayans and Southern Hemisphere beauties.

Tip for anybody recovering from cancer.

On a warm evening collect seeds now. Use old envelopes and go around the garden looking for - aquilegias, foxgloves, lupins and poppies put in different envelopes then distribute to friends and family

June Skinner, Cherry Hill, Derbyshire