

Jobs for the month

You can always find something to do on your plot, no matter what time of year it is. Use this guide to inspire you with suggestions for jobs to do each month. Some planting suggestions are also included but for a more detailed guide, use the Vegetable Planner to plan your growing.

January

- Order the year's seeds, onion sets and seed potatoes, or visit Dundry Nurseries during their spud weekend.
- Map your plot adopting a three or four year rotation plan using the Vegetable Planner as a guide.
- Start off garlic and shallots in pots and begin chitting potatoes inside a greenhouse or coldframe.
- If you have a heated greenhouse, you can sow sweet peas and French beans inside in pots or a propagator.
- Apply a potash dressing to the roots of strawberries, gooseberries and currant plants, taking care to avoid the leaves, as this will cause scorching.
- If you have overwintering vegetables under cloches or fleece, don't forget to ventilate and allow plenty of fresh air to get in on sunny days. Under glass the January sun can push temperatures as high as on a hot summer's day.
- Pack some straw or fleece around celery to protect it from frost damage but remove it on sunny days to let the plants breathe.
- Draw the soil up around the stalks of cabbages and winter cauliflowers to just under the first set of leaves. If not already protected, support Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli, to prevent toppling in high winds.
- Take advantage of days when the soil is frozen hard to barrow and stack manure and compost close to where it will be dug in later on. Don't walk on the soil as it begins to thaw it will be wet and sticky.
- If you have any plants or seedlings ticking over in a cold greenhouse cover them with several layers of newspaper on frosty nights but remove it on warm days.
- Dig up rhubarb roots and divide them leaving the sections on the surface of the soil for a few days to frost prior to forcing. Cover any crowns in the soil that have been set aside for forcing with an upturned bucket or flower pot and cover the drainage holes to shut out the light. With luck you will be harvesting pale pink sticks by late February.
- Check on any fruit and vegetables in store and remove any that are diseased or soft.
- Towards the end of the month when the weather and soil conditions allow, plant soft fruit bushes. Spray all fruit trees and bushes with a garlic winter wash on a fine day; do not spray in frosty conditions. It won't hurt to hold the job over to next month.
- Seed potatoes will be available during the month. Buy or order and collect egg trays to chit them in. On days when you can't work on the plot clean

the shed, greenhouse, greenhouse glass, tools and linseed oil wooden handles. Wash pots and seed trays with a weak solution of household bleach or detergent, and rinse. Check watering cans and buckets for holes and that the wheelbarrow doesn't have a flat tyre.

- Prune dormant fruit trees such as apples and pears, and prune soft fruit bushes if not done already.
- Old bags of compost deteriorate over time so use up by spreading as a soil improver.

February

- Sow lettuce, cabbage, peas and cauliflower in a heated greenhouse.
- Plant new rhubarb crowns just below the surface.
- If you'd like an early crop, plant broad beans in pots.
- Tie in new blackberry shoots as they appear and before they get too long, and prune back blackcurrant bushes.
- Start succession sowing of radishes and summer spinach.
- If the ground isn't too hard or wet, sow your onion sets.
- Sow your first peas in pots in the greenhouse, or directly in the ground under a fleece or cloche.
- Cover your strawberry patch with fleece to keep the ground warm and protect the plants from the worst of the weather.
- Top dress all fruit trees and soft fruit bushes with a general fertiliser at the recommended application rate. At the same time top dress the rest of the plot with a general fertiliser as land becomes available.
- Check over any fruit trees and bushes for damage and disease problems and take appropriate action.
- Prune late/autumn fruiting raspberries down as low as possible and mulch around them. Bend summer fruiting varieties over to a hoop shape to encourage the development of fruiting side shoots.
- Complete any outstanding winter pruning of soft fruit bushes cutting out down to soil level the older dark stemmed shoots of blackcurrants.
- Cover the soil with cloches or sheets of plastic to warm it up in readiness for the next batch of sowing and planting. Little and often is the plan over the coming weeks.
- Check chitting potatoes and rub off any eyes that are unwanted, leaving three or four well-spaced shoots. Keep some fleece or newspapers handy to cover and protect them on frosty nights.
- Regularly check the condition of any produce in store as it will stir after its winter dormancy and start to re-grow.
- Dig a runner bean trench to a spade depth by 75cm wide and start to deposit green waste and other compostable material, including compost and well rotted manure in it, spread evenly along the length and width.
- If the ground is soft enough continue digging your plot, turning in any weeds that have survived the winter. Lift perennial weeds and leave on the surface to die before composting.

March

- Plant strawberries, raspberries, and parsnip seeds.
- Start succession sowing of chard, beetroot and spinach.
- If you've sown early lettuce, now is the time to thin it out.
- If you've any leeks left in the ground from last year, harvest them so you can dig over the land for new planting. If it's warm enough, sow this year's leeks in pots.
- Plant sunflower seeds in pots in a greenhouse or cold frame.
- Cut back autumn raspberries to the ground.
- Sow cauliflower, sprouts, and summer cabbage for summer transplanting.
- Dig all of your vacant vegetable beds over ready for spring planting.
- Complete any unfinished winter pruning.
- Clear the old leaves off strawberry plants and clean up the ground in between the plants before giving them a top dressing of a general fertiliser. Keep some fleece handy to protect the developing strawberry flowers from frost.
- When the weather conditions allow, complete the preparations of seed beds for direct seed sowing. Break up clods and rake to a fine tilth. Spread the job out over several days to allow the surface of the soil to dry out.
- Apply fertiliser if required.
- Dig a runner bean trench 75cm wide by a 30cm deep and, over the next few weeks, deposit compost and compostable materials in it, so they rot down ready for planting.
- Check ties and stakes on fruit trees and bushes before they break into growth.
- Dig in any green manures.

April

- Plant early potatoes in the first week and main crop varieties by the end of the month.
- Prune back gooseberries and currants.
- Plant early carrots, as well as any sweet peas you started off in the greenhouse.
- Sow courgettes, pumpkins, squashes, tomatoes, sweetcorn, beans, peas and mange-touts in pots in the greenhouse or cold frame.
- As your plants start to spring in to life, so will the weeds, so make sure to keep on top of them. 'Tickle' the soil with a hoe as often as you can to keep the weeds under control.
- Harden off plants raised indoors by moving outside during the day.
- Thin seedlings and re-pot any plants that have become pot bound.
- Put up pea sticks before sown seeds get established, or before planting out indoor raised plants, ready to support them as they mature.
- Feed strawberries with a sprinkling of potash or a liquid feed of tomato fertiliser.

- You'll start to accumulate compostable material, so make sure your compost bin is ready to receive. Leave perennial weeds on the surface to die before composting.
- Greenfly and whitefly numbers will be on the increase indoors and under glass. Spray with appropriate insecticide or insecticidal soap. Evenings are best, when beneficial insects are not active.

May

- Become a weather watcher and be prepared to protect any tender plants with fleece or cloches against frost damage.
- Continue with succession sowing of your vegetables and salad crops.
- Earth up your potatoes to protect the new growth from late frost damage, and to ensure swelling tubers are kept covered and protected from turning green and poisonous.
- Be on watch for pests that want to share your crops or devour them. Birds, butterflies, moths, slugs and snails, and other insect pests will be delighted if you leave them unprotected.
- Tie in new shoots on autumn raspberries and sweet peas.
- Plant out seedlings from your greenhouse such as beans, courgettes and squashes when the danger of frost has passed.
- Plant Sweetcorn.
- Apply mulch to discourage weeds and help your soil to retain moisture, and continue to weed.
- Thin seedlings such as carrots, beetroot and lettuce to give them space to swell and grow.
- Support broad beans by staking at the end of rows, and feeding string either side of the bean plants and tying to the posts.
- Hoe at every opportunity. Large weeds can still run to seed once unearthed so pick them up.

June

- Watering little and often, rather than a weekly deluge, is most efficient for plants to germinate and develop.
- A mulch of garden compost will help retain moisture and suppress weeds.
- Start harvesting strawberries, gooseberries, and asparagus.
- Continue earthing up potatoes.
- Erect climbing bean supports and train and tie in any already planted.
- Continue to thin out seedlings of beetroot, carrot and lettuce.
- Plant tomato plants in the ground and feed them regularly. June is also the time to plant out the leeks from your greenhouse.
- Pinch out the growing points of peas to ensure a large crop as possible.
- Choose the strongest runners on your strawberry plants for propagation, cut them off and pot them.
- Eight to ten weeks after planting, unearth your early potatoes and enjoy.

- Transplant leeks to their final growing position. Dib a hole 15cm deep x 4-5cm dia. for each plant, trim the straggly roots to 3-4cm, drop them in the hole and water them in without filling in the hole.
- Sow early turnips for an autumn crop.
- Net blackcurrant bushes.
- Keep fruit bushes and trees well fed and watered.
- Cut back herbs before they flower.
- Continue weeding and 'tickle' the soil with your hoe regularly.

July

- Sow parsley for the winter.
- Sow winter greens such as Brussels sprouts and winter cabbage, and autumn cauliflower.
- Thoroughly feed your vegetables.
- Start lifting onions and shallots towards the end of the month, leaving them to dry, off the ground if possible.
- Keep picking sweet peas.
- If more than three years old, replace your strawberry plants when they've stopped fruiting.
- If sown this month there's still time to harvest beetroot and late varieties of carrots.
- Continue to weed.
- Maintain a healthy growing atmosphere by balancing watering, damping down and ventilation in your greenhouse.
- Start to thin apples and plums.
- Clear any beds where crops have been harvested and mulch after weeding.

August

- Thoroughly feed and water courgettes and tomatoes, and pick them as they ripen.
- Cut back Jerusalem artichoke stems to around a foot from the ground.
- Sow main crop turnips, and begin sowing succession rows of winter spinach.
- Sow winter salad and spring cabbages.
- Lift and dry main crop onions.
- Pinch out the growing tips of runner beans when they reach the top of their supports.
- Now is a good time to sow early green manure, such as clover, in any soil that has become bare.
- Nip out the side shoots of cordon tomatoes and pinch out the growing tip when four or five trusses have set.
- Support tomatoes and cucumbers as they grow and the fruit develops, and feed regularly with a liquid tomato feed.
- Prune summer fruiting raspberries.
- Prepare new strawberry beds ready for planting new crowns.
- Keep on top of the watering and weeding.

September

- Unearth main crop potatoes.
- Start lifting Jerusalem artichokes.
- Harvest sweetcorn as it ripens, as well as early varieties of apple and pear.
- Save and label seeds from annuals and perennials, and clean and store canes and other supports.
- Take cuttings of currants and gooseberries.
- Transplant spring cabbage plants to their final growing position, this month or next.
- Stake Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli.

October

- Sow winter lettuce in your greenhouse or coldframe.
- Put a cloche over any French beans still growing to extend their season.
- Cut back your asparagus plants and cover them in a layer of manure or compost.
- Prune gooseberries.
- Sow early peas, broad beans, and spring bulbs.
- Plant overwintering onion sets.
- Stake your Brussels sprouts if necessary and remove any yellowing leaves.
- Harvest squashes, pumpkins, and any remaining beetroot.

November

- Begin harvesting leeks as needed. They don't store well.
- Keep a close eye out for slugs and pests on winter lettuce.
- Prune your fruit bushes and trees if not done already.
- Plant overwintering garlic sets.
- Sow overwintering varieties of broad beans.
- Plant bare rooted gooseberry and current bushes.
- Roughly dig any bare soil and leave clumps to break down over the winter.

December

- Assess what grew well and what didn't do so over the year and begin planning next year's crop rotation.
- Harvest parsnips after the first frost as needed.
- Give all this year's pots, seed trays, and other equipment a thorough wash and clean.
- Sharpen tools and apply linseed oil to bare wooden handles.

- Clean the greenhouse and cloche glass.
- Divide rhubarb rootstock to create new crowns. Dig up and divide the existing crown into sections with a sharp spade, each with a bud, and replant under a mulch of well-rotted manure.
- Dig well-rotted manure or compost into spare ground.
- Boxing Day is considered to be a good day to plant onion seeds indoors.