



A more digestible Guide to Jobs to do on the
Allotment in October

Composited off the Internet
By Gareth Richards

Fruit & Vegetable Growing Guide for October

October is really the last of the hectic months on the vegetable plot. There's little to sow and plant but still a fair amount to harvest and store away to eat through winter. This is the month when the first frosts usually arrive so killing off all but the hardy plants.

Sowing & Planting in October on the Vegetable Plot

Over-wintered broad beans can go in from the middle of the month to provide an early crop next year. Whilst they're very hardy, they don't like sitting in water so on heavy soils they can be a gamble and you may prefer to just sow early on next year.

The last sowing of beet leaf spinach can be made early in the month and you may be able to just fit in some Chinese cabbage.

October is the last chance for planting out Japanese onion sets. These are hardy, short-daylight onions so will bulb up about a month earlier next year than the normal onions but they don't store as well so go for a smaller quantity rather than larger.

It's worth protecting them with a cloche or netting until well established as they hold a magnetic attraction for pigeons who seem to delight in pulling them from the ground and throwing them to the side.

You can plant out garlic in October but generally it's a November job. However, if the weather turns nasty then you'll have one less task to do outside.

General Garden Tasks for October

There's not a lot to do except for keeping weeds in check with the established crops. If you've got Brussels Sprouts it's worth checking they're firm in the ground as wind-rock breaks the tiny hairs on the roots that take in the nutrients. Earthing up a few inches around the stems and treading in or staking should be enough. In very windy areas a wind break can save the day.

If the leaves are looking a little yellow, apply a high nitrogen liquid feed around each plant and this should perk them up enough to ensure good firm sprouts for Christmas. With other brassicas, remove any yellowed leaves as they are of no use to the plant and will encourage botrytis to develop.

If you've a green manure crop like mustard mature, now is the time to dig it in. Generally I find mustard produces a lot of foliage which can be cut with shears about a foot (30cm) off the ground. Compost the cut foliage and dig in the rest.

As ground becomes vacant, you can dig it over, With heavy clay soils just leave the clods unbroken and the freezing / thawing action of winter weather will break them up, giving you a fine tilth to work with in the spring.

Spread manure or compost over the surface and leave for the worms to drag down into the ground or lime if appropriate.

Digging Over the Plot

October and November are good months for serious digging. The deeper the fertile soil, the better crops that can be had. Double digging where you remove a trench and then break up the sub-soil with a fork prior to adding a good layer of manure or compost and then place the soil from the next trench on top will greatly improve your soil.

With light deep soils that don't benefit from annual digging, sow a green manure like field beans that will hold the nutrients in the soil over winter until spring when you dig them in to add both humus and nutrients

Now is the time to concentrate on your compost making. The last of the bulk foliage should be available to build a proper heap rather than a waste pile. Emptying one bin into another, layering with lime and nitrogen rich manure as it builds, will ensure decomposition gets off to a good start.

Consider where you intend to plant your runner beans and start a bean trench, digging it out and lining with newspapers (six sheets thick) before adding compostable kitchen waste, lawn clippings etc and covering with soil.

Fruit

This is a good month to prune your blackcurrants, redcurrants and gooseberries. Your raspberries and blackberries need cutting back, tying in etc and these early winter months are ideal for planting out new stock. Make sure the ground is well prepared and add a good 500gr of mixed bonemeal and hoof and horn per plant to the base of the planting hole, forked in. This will slowly release its nitrogen and phosphorus over the next year or two giving stronger plants earlier.

October Greenhouse Tasks

If you've still got crops, open the vents on fine days to avoid developing a muggy atmosphere which encourages fungal diseases. As tomatoes etc. finish, clear them out and wash any old pots etc before putting them away.

If you can, give the house a good clean with a little detergent and disinfectant and a scrubbing brush.

Clean glass will allow more light through in the dark days and cleaning the frame will remove pests looking for a good spot to over-winter. Once clean you can insulate it. Bubble wrap is good or heatsheets will do the job.

Sow a hardy lettuce like Arctic King and grow in your greenhouse border to give you a salad whatever the weather

Harvest

Any remaining maincrop potatoes should be ready. When the haulm (leaves) starts dying back you cut it off and leave the potatoes for a couple of weeks. This will make the skins set and hopefully prevent any stray potato blight spores from the haulm infecting your tubers. Wait for a sunny dry day and dig up the potatoes, brushing off excess soil and letting them dry off before storing in hessian or paper sacks in a frost free, dark shed.

The last of the beans should be picked now, compost the foliage but leaving the roots with their nitrogen full nodules in the soil will act as a fertiliser.

Maincrop carrots should be dug up to be stored in sand or peat through the winter but leave the parsnips in the ground as they'll be sweeter after a frost.

Drumhead cabbages that are ready should be harvested. They'll keep remarkably well in a frost-free shed but be aware that a slug that may be lurking under the leaves. Sprinkling the outside with salt will deter them from eating away through the winter.

You can harvest Salsify and Scorzonera. Salsify is also known as the 'vegetable oyster' and, properly cooked, salsify is a gourmet's delight of a vegetable.

Any green tomatoes on outdoor plants can come in now before the frost gets them. You can make a green tomato chutney or ripen them up indoors.

Green tomatoes will actually store quite well in cool conditions and slowly ripen or you can hasten the ripening process by popping them in a tray in a sunny windowsill with a ripe banana.

Growing in a Polytunnel in October

What to sow, plant and harvest from your polytunnel in October

October is the month for clearing and tidying. Your cucumbers and courgettes are likely to be finished and many other plants are getting exhausted and diseased, but hopefully you have a batch of new salad crops ready to plant out now. I always enjoy this time of year when the tunnel or greenhouse becomes completely transformed and rejuvenated again.

Sowing in the Polytunnel

Direct sowing into beds

There is now plenty of space again for sowing directly into the beds. Any salad crop can be sown directly into the ground now or sown into modules for planting out later. The decision is yours.

Planting into beds

I always look forward to planting out the garlic cloves into the beds in October. If you plant them in early October they will be ready and harvested in May just in time before your tomatoes need to be planted. You can also plant overwintering onion sets.

Sowing into modules/pots (18-20°C)

The best time for your overwintering salads was really in September, but if you have missed that date you can still sow them now. They may not be ready before the end of the year but will produce well in late winter until early spring.

Claytonia (or Winter Purslane) – 5 seeds per cell

Chervil, Coriander, Dill – 5 seeds per cell each

Oriental brassica salads (all types) – 5 seeds per cell

Scallions (Ishikura Bunching) – 10 seeds per cell

Spinach (annual) – 4 seeds per cell

Harvesting from the Polytunnel

In October the summer crops are fizzling out and their quality declines. You may still harvest some:

Aubergines, basil, calabrese, coriander, Chinese cabbage, courgette, cucumber, dill, Florence fennel, French beans, lettuce, melons, oriental brassica salads, pak choi, parsley, peppers, salads, scallions, spinach and tomatoes.

General Polytunnel maintenance

Hardly water at all – once a week at the most.

Ventilate as much as possible.

Clear all remaining summer crops. Don't leave any of their crop residues in your tunnel or greenhouse otherwise their relevant pests and diseases will be carried over to the new crops.

Start chitting your first early potatoes indoors.

Continue harvesting your winter salads.

Prepare the soil for the early spring crops by incorporating compost or composted manure into the soil.

Tidy and clean the tunnel or greenhouse: wash the plastic or glass, clean and tidy away the pots and trays.

Clean your tools and rub boiled linseed oil onto the handles and a mixture of old oil and diesel to get rid of rust on metal blades.
Order your seeds, seed potatoes, onion sets and garlic bulbs.

How to Contact the Editor

If you have comments or you know I have given wrong advice then please contact me by email at

info@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contribute or have a say on allotment life, then please use my email to send your contributions.

I am going to process the magazine issue once a month, so if there are comments you would like to make they can be answered in future editions.

I would like to add that most of the articles are taken off the web and some well known gardening and allotments magazines have been read in the making of our magazine content.

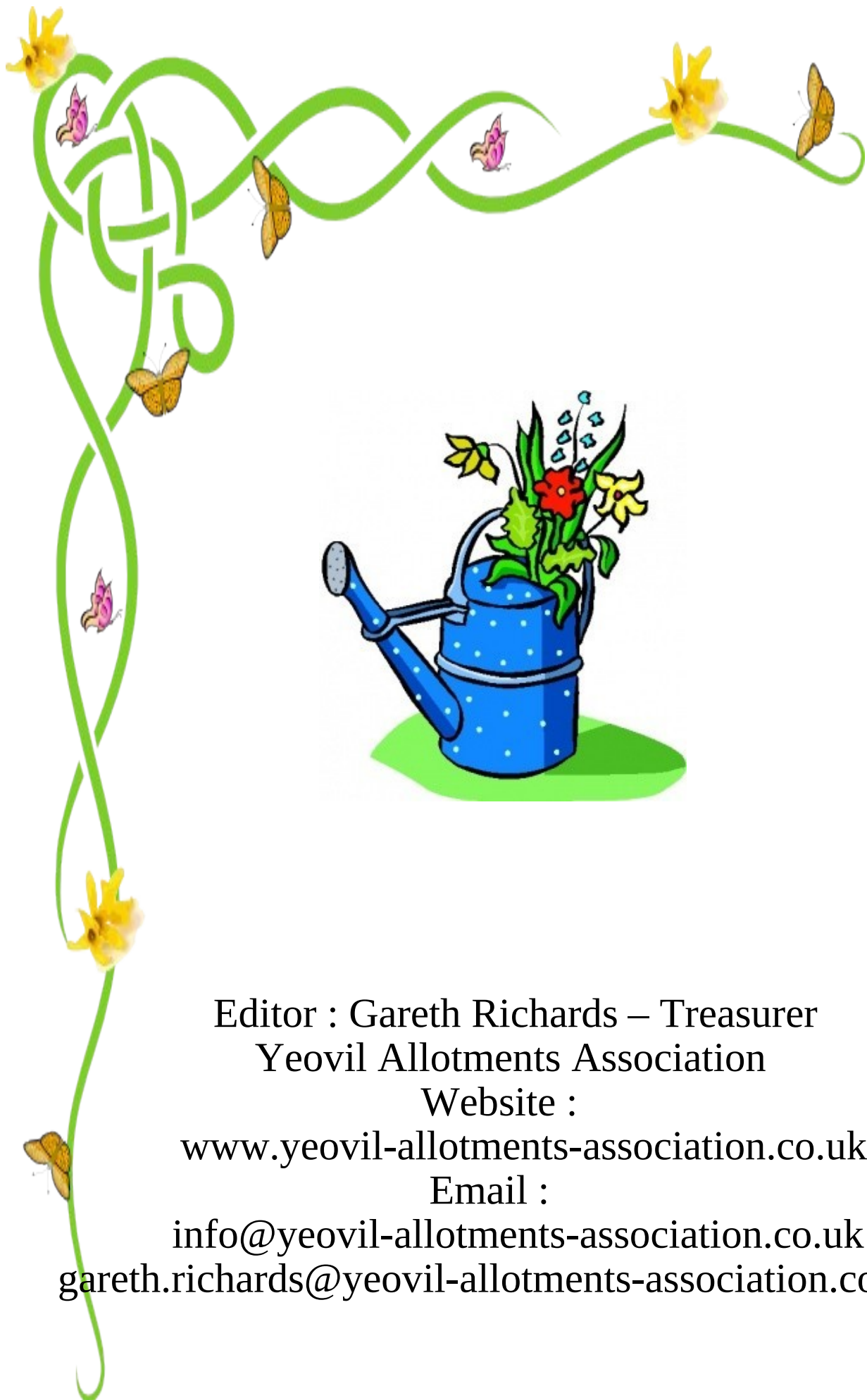
We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenting and best wishes,

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