

Green and pleasant

NOVEMBER is here, the clocks have gone back, the leaves are falling and it's getting colder and wetter. As autumn turns to winter, the main jobs in the garden are mostly about protecting plants and structures from the wilder weather which will inevitably arrive. Move plants into the greenhouse, or into a sheltered spot, but if you can't, it is worth wrapping them. Remember winter can be a tough time for birds in terms of water and food, so keep supplies well topped up.

By **Geoff Stonebanks**

Have you thought about a real Christmas tree for next month? Dare I say, it's not long now and lots of companies are taking orders. I've had a real tree in the house most years as I love the smell. The last few years I've also placed one in the garden with fairy lights on too. Time this month to make a decision!

Fireworks in the garden

With Bonfire Night on the horizon, there are quite a few plants that are very reminiscent of fireworks. One in particular, Allium Schubertii, is the firework allium par excellence, with vast wonderful dark pink, spiky flowers. It is very eccentric and showy while flowering and great when dried too. Schubertii is a bulbous perennial producing bright-green, strap-shaped leaves in spring, which die back before the flowers appear. These consist of 50 or more star-shaped, pinky-purple florets on stems of differing lengths producing a starburst effect up to 30cm across. So maybe this month is a good time to plant some in your garden for great results in 2025 and beyond!

Another firework inspired planting might be Pennisetum setaceum 'Fireworks' (ruepplli) which makes a lively addition to bedding displays and patio containers. The fluffy seed heads can be also cut to make elegant dried flowers. The colourful foliage of this fountain grass emerges with bold stripes of red, pink and green, before maturing to a rich shade of burgundy. From mid-summer to autumn, the showy purple flower spikes rise above the arching foliage in a spectacular architectural "bonfire" display.

Preparing for the first frost

It is always difficult to get the timing right, ensuring everything is safe and sound in the garden prior to the first frosts every year! Prime tasks should be to lift and store dahlias, cannas and begonia tubers that are planted out planted in flower beds or containers. All the guides say lift after the first frost and store the tubers carefully. The experts say dahlia tubers must remain dry but not dry out completely. Place in a dry, frost-free environment, evenly spaced in a tray or box and fill with sawdust, spent dry compost or vermiculite.

November tasks

Here's a few suggestions on things to do in the garden this month providing the weather is in your favour! If, like me, you have potted chrysanthemums in the garden, keep them moist and do remember to deadhead them regularly in order to keep the flowers coming as long as possible. If growing cyclamen, remove leaves that are yellowing, along with the faded flowers, by pulling them from the corm. To prevent leaves from turning yellow it is best to keep them in a cool and bright place. Check on your potted plants that are kept for flowering over winter and ensure they have enough water. For dormant plants being overwintered in a frost-free place you will need to cut down on the watering.

I've already picked all my fruit growing in the garden but if you have yet to collect yours, now is the time to do so. Pick ripe apples and, depending on the variety, either eat or store in a cool, dry place for later in the year. I tend to peel and poach all mine, then freeze in containers for use throughout the winter months, in pies and crumbles. I've also got a conference pear tree and have done the same with them.

Grasses

This time of the year is a great time to cut back many grass flowers or tatty seed heads. The flower and seed heads of ornamental grasses play a vital factor in providing winter interest and look wonderful covered in frost or snow, but there's a good chance they are looking a bit untidy now as they collapse and break away. In this case, the best thing to do is to cut them back to the base with secateurs. The front beach garden at *Driftwood* is awash with many grasses, my favourite of which is stipa tenuissima or pony tails grass. It is a wonderfully impressive plant, with its evergreen base clump of leaves topped in summer with an array of flowering spikes, which turn from silvery green to gold.

Read more of Geoff's garden at **www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk** or follow both him and the garden on social media.

Geoff is a member of the Garden Media Guild and multi-award-winning garden owner, garden writer & broadcaster. Driftwood has appeared twice on BBC2 Gardeners' World and was a finalist in Gardeners' World Magazine Best Small Space. See the amazing 5-star reviews on TripAdvisor. Read all about Geoff's work for the community, appointment as a Coronation Champion and trips to Buckingham Palace including two Royal Garden Parties, in 2018 and 2023. Read the many published features on the garden in national, local and worldwide media, including TV.