

short cold days and long dark nights.....

The next couple of months are relatively quiet so many of you will want to sit back and take a well-deserved rest. However, it is also a good time to catch up with unfinished tasks and to prepare for next spring, such as order seeds and seed potatoes, tidy out the shed, clean the greenhouse, collect plastic water bottles to make mini-cloches, clean plant pots, repair frames, and plan your crop rotation for next year.

VEGETABLES

Sow indoors

You can sow lettuce, radishes, round varieties of carrots, spinach, salad onions and turnips. Place them on a windowsill or in a propagator.

Plant outside

Garlic cloves can be planted, e.g. Thermidrome and Printantor.

Harvest

Jerusalem artichokes, perpetual spinach, brussels sprouts, winter cabbage, savoy cabbage, carrots, celeriac, celery, chicory (non-forcing and forcing varieties), endive, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, parsnip, radish, salsify, scorzonera, spinach, swede, turnips.

FRUIT

- * Plant rhubarb crowns
- * Cover established rhubarb to force early shoots
- * Cut down canes of autumn-fruiting raspberries which have finished fruiting and burn to prevent fungal diseases spreading.
- * Plant bare-rooted fruit trees and bushes this month.
- * Check that young trees are supported with stakes and ties.
- * Winter prune young apple and pear trees.
- * Place grease bands around tree trunks to prevent winter moths from climbing trees and laying eggs (see over).

GENERAL TASKS

- * Continue digging over the ground incorporating manure. Don't dig when the soil is wet such that it sticks to boots and tools.



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A new products against slugs and snails

Iron (ferric) phosphate is a mineral salt that is common in nature. It is a solid, is not volatile, and does not readily dissolve in water, which means it doesn't move readily from where it is applied. It is sold as pellets that also contain a cereal bait to attract snails and slugs. When they eat the pellets, the iron phosphate interferes with calcium metabolism in their gut, causing the snails and slugs to stop eating almost immediately. They die three to six days later. It has been approved for use in the United States since 1997 where many of testing requirements were waived as it is 'generally regarded as safe'. It has been used in Germany for a similar length of time.

The UK's Pesticides Safety Directorate required ferric phosphate to undergo the same testing as are required for other pesticides. In 2004 they approved its use. Ferric phosphate compares extremely favourably with metaldehyde (the chemical in blue slug pellets). It is almost non-toxic to birds, mammals and other wildlife. Also, because it doesn't dissolve in water it remains effective after rain and after watering. Its only downside is that because it is mixed with a cereal bait it can sometimes attract rodents. It is sold by Growing Success Organics Ltd as 'Advanced Slug Killer' and is available in most garden centres.



- * Cover bare ground with leaves, weed cloth, straw or similar to prevent soil erosion. Beds to be dug first in spring can be covered with polythene so prevent them from becoming waterlogged. This will allow them to be dug earlier.
- * Collect fallen leaves and store them in containers made from chicken wire (see November's tips) or in plastic bags. Leaves break down to form leaf mould, an excellent soil supplement.
- * Collect remaining crop residues or other organic matter and add to the compost heap.
- * Put out bird seed and fat balls to feed birds through the winter.
- * Cover compost bins to keep the rain out and heat in.
- * Set up water butts to collect rain water from shed and greenhouse roofs.
- * Remove yellowing leaves from winter brassicas. These are not useful to the plant and will encourage botrytis to develop.
- * Check stored crops removing any showing signs of rot.
- * If your pond freezes over frogs can be deprived of oxygen. Floating a small ball in the pond will keep a small area clear.
- * Protect the curds of cauliflowers to keep them white and delaying the time when they will open up by bending or tying the inner leaves over them.
- * Net winter brassicas to protect them from pigeon damage.
- * Earth up spring cabbages to anchor them better in high winds.



Winter moth

Winter moths (*Operophtera brumata*) are unspectacular in appearance. The males are grayish brown and about 10 mm long with 25 mm wingspans. The females have almost no wings. They survive through the summer and autumn as pupae in the soil with the adult moths emerging between November and January. The wingless females climb up the trunk of fruit trees (and other deciduous trees) to mate and lay their eggs. These eggs hatch into caterpillars which grow up to 25mm in length and are pale green with paler lines running lengthwise along their bodies. They move with a characteristic looping action due to the fact that they only have two pairs of clasping legs on their abdomen. From late March the caterpillars feed off tree leaves, completing their feeding by early June when they drop down to the soil to pupate.

Damaged tree leaves initially have small holes and are loosely bound with silk threads. Damage becomes more noticeable in mid-summer when the leaves are fully expanded and the holes have enlarged due to leaf growth. Blossom and developing fruitlets can also be damaged. At least two other moths, the mottled umber moth (*Erannis defoliaria*), and the March moth (*Alsophila aescularia*) have wingless females with a similar lifestyle but the winter moth is most significant as a garden pest.

Although significant commercial losses have been recorded trees can tolerate some leaf loss. In fact, established trees can lose up to 25% of their leaves and still bounce back. However, it is more important to protect young trees.

Winter moth damage can be reduced by taking a few relatively easy precautions.

- ◆ Grease bands should be placed around the trunks of fruit trees before the adults begin to emerge in November (don't forget to place them around tree stakes too). They should be about 45cm (18in) above soil level and will trap the females as they climb. Winter moth activity declines after January but some species with wingless females are active until April, so grease may need to be reapplied from time to time. Ready-prepared sticky papers can be used on smooth barked trees while a ring of grease can be applied directly to trees with fissured bark. Both products are available from many garden centres or by mail order from companies such as The Organic Gardening Catalogue (0845 130 1304), Agralan (01285 860015) and Growing Success Organics Ltd (01722 337744).
- ◆ From November through January in the evenings you may find the wingless females with a cloud of male moths around them. Remove any you find.
- ◆ Look inside buds and leaf clusters for eggs or caterpillars and crush any you find.



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- ◆ Eliminate the hazards of pesticides
- ◆ Reduce dependence on pesticides
- ◆ Promote alternatives to pesticides

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