

OLD LORE
REMINDER

*'When berries are many in
October, beware a hard winter'*



The European nuthatch enjoys seeds in autumn

Still golden

The light is low and luminous and there's plenty of reason to be outside. The gardening year has more left in it than you might think.

October catches people out. They think the season is winding down, but there is more to do and more to enjoy than almost any other month. The trees are extraordinary, the light is something else entirely, and every bulb you plant now is a promise to yourself for spring.

● Plant a tree

Bare-root trees go on sale from now and establish far better when

planted in autumn than in spring, settling in over winter before putting all their energy into growth. Even a small garden has room for a crab apple, a silver birch or a rowan. Choose well and you are planting something that will outlast you for generations to come.

● Plant bare-root hedging

October to March is bare-root season, when hedging plants are lifted dormant and sold without

PLATINUM EXPERT



Alan Coxon

Food and heritage expert, and curator of projects from *Roaming the Paths* to *Alan's Almanac*, Alan is Platinum's gardening voice. With a passion for the land and a gift for unearthing timeless wisdom, Alan is our guide through the year – sharing know-how, inspiration and a few winks of humour along the way. Find out more at roaming-the-paths.co.uk and alans-almanac.co.uk.

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pots at a fraction of the cost of container stock. Hawthorn, hornbeam, beech and field maple all establish well and are excellent for wildlife. Plant into a prepared trench, firm in well and water if the weather is dry.

● Fill the bird table

Natural food sources are running short now and garden birds need supplementing through the colder months. Different species want different things: robins love mealworms, finches are devoted to sunflower hearts, and thrushes will work through windfall fruit all afternoon. Fresh water matters as much as food once frost arrives.

● Plant tulip bulbs

October is the best month for tulips. The cooler soil temperature reduces the risk of tulip fire disease, so resist planting earlier, however tempting it feels. Choose a sunny, well-drained spot, plant at three times the bulb's own depth and label as you go. The finest varieties sell out fast.



TOP TIP

October is the last good chance to move shrubs or perennials that are in the wrong place. Once the soil cools, moving becomes more of a risk. Dig generously, keep as much root as you can, water in well and they will settle over winter.

Did you know?

● Fungi are at their most visible in October, but what we see are just the fruiting bodies. The real organism, the mycelium, runs as a web through the soil all year, and can span acres. It is one of the most complex networks on earth, and almost entirely invisible.

● Conkers contain a compound called aescin with anti-inflammatory properties used in herbal medicine since the Middle Ages. Whether they keep spiders at bay is less proven, but the experiment costs nothing.

● The word October comes from the Latin for eight: it was the eighth month of the early Roman calendar before January and February were added. Gardeners still feel it belongs somewhere between the end of one thing and the start of something else.

● Starling murmurations begin in earnest from October, as birds arrive from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe to join our resident population. Their shape-shifting aerial displays at dusk are one of nature's great spectacles, appearing over reed beds, farmland and city centres without warning.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

● Fungi Foraging Walk, Carey's Secret Garden, Wareham, Dorset

2 and 30 October 2026
Two guided fungi foraging walks with Andy Knott of Jurassic Coast Mushrooms. These are for anyone who wants to learn identification, understand the role of fungi in the woodland ecosystem and explore this award-winning three-acre garden at its most atmospheric. Tickets £40 per person; joint tickets £75. careyssecretgarden.co.uk

● Winkworth Arboretum, Godalming, Surrey

Open daily throughout October
The National Trust's arboretum in the Surrey Hills is one of the finest places



in Britain to see autumn colour, with Japanese and American maples turning every shade of red, gold and amber. A new visitor building and café opened this summer, so it's a particularly good moment to visit or return. Open daily, 10am to 5pm. nationaltrust.org.uk/winkworth-arboretum

Book of the month

Literary Gardens: The Imaginary Gardens of Writers and Poets
by Sandra Lawrence, illustrated by Lucille Clerc (Frances Lincoln)

From the locked garden in *The Secret Garden* to the dreamlike lawns of *The Great Gatsby*, Sandra Lawrence explores 50 of literature's most memorable imaginary gardens, brought to life in exquisite illustrations. The ideal October companion.

