

OLD LORE
REMINDER

*'Thick onion skins, hard winter;
thin onion skins, mild winter'*



Keep your garden's nest box clean, ready for birds to nest in again

Digging in

November has a satisfaction all its own – not much fanfare, just steady work and getting the garden squared away before season's end.

November doesn't get the credit it deserves. People assume the garden has finished, but there is real craft in these weeks – small stuff, but you will notice if it doesn't get done. Get outside while the light lasts, and treat every clear day like a gift.

● See off the winter moth

Apple and pear trees need a bit of help keeping winter moth at bay this month. Wrap a sticky "grease

band" around the trunk, and it will trap the wingless females as they climb up to lay their eggs. Left unchecked, the spring caterpillars can shred blossom and tunnel into fruit. It costs little, takes minutes, and pays off at harvest time.

● Wrap your tender exotics

Tree ferns, banana plants and cordylines will not thank you for a hard frost. Before the cold really bites, pack the crown with straw or

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.

bracken, wrap the trunk in horticultural fleece or hessian, and tie the leaves up over the top for insulation. A bit of fuss now saves a sorry, blackened mess later.

● Clean out old nest boxes

With the breeding season long finished, give nest boxes a thorough clean: gloves on, scrape out old nesting material, and scald the inside with boiling water to see off any lingering parasites. Leave the lid open to dry, then close it up again. Birds often roost in clean boxes through hard winter nights, so it is a kindness twice over.

● Get free plants for next year

Once shrubs have dropped their leaves and gone dormant, take pencil-thick cuttings from healthy stems of currants, dogwood, gooseberries, forsythia or viburnum. Cut into 20-30cm lengths, with a sloping cut at the top to show which way is up. Push two-thirds of each stem into a pot of gritty compost. Leave alone over winter and, with luck, they'll root.



ALAN'S
TOP TIP

Before the first hard frost catches you out, drain outdoor hoses, disconnect them from the tap, and bring them in somewhere frost-free. A burst pipe in January is a miserable way to start the year.

Did you know?

● Fieldfares and redwings arrive in their thousands from Scandinavia this month, stripping hedgerows of berries almost as fast as the birds can find them. Plant hawthorn, rowan or crab apple and you are, in effect, laying on a very popular banquet.

● Grey squirrels bury thousands of nuts each autumn, relying on memory and smell to dig them up. The ones they never come back for are far from wasted – they're often how new oak and hazel trees get started.

● Common ivy is one of the last plants to flower each year, still offering pollen and nectar into November. It is a lifeline for late bees and the rare ivy bee, and its berries will go on to feed thrushes and blackbirds right through winter.

● Long-tailed tits turn to each other for central heating. As temperatures fall, these tiny birds roost pressed tightly together on branches, sometimes in surprisingly large groups, sharing body heat to survive cold nights. If you spot a little procession of them moving through the garden in November, chances are they won't be travelling alone for long.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

● RHS Glow, RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey

Selected dates, 20 November 2026 – 3 January 2027

All five RHS gardens light up for the festive season, and Wisley's glowing route has been reworked again this year with new light and sound displays through the grounds after dark. Expect twinkling trails, live music, mulled drinks and Christmas shopping once you've wandered the whole route. rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley/whats-on/wisley-glow

● Holly Wreath Workshop, Preston Bissett Nurseries, Buckinghamshire

Friday 27 November 2026

Bring an apron and a pair of secateurs and spend the afternoon making your



Make your own festive wreath

own 12-inch holly wreath from scratch, with all the materials and refreshments included. Stay on afterwards for afternoon tea in the garden tipi if you fancy making a day of it. £65 per person. thenurseries.com

Book of the month

Dopamine Gardening: 52 Joyful Outdoor Projects for Every Season and Any Space

by Amy Chapman (Pavilion)

West Wales cottage gardener Amy has put together a project for every week of the year, built around the idea that pottering with plants makes us happier. All the projects, such as winter windowsill growing and homemade bird feeders, are low-cost and doable in even small spaces.

