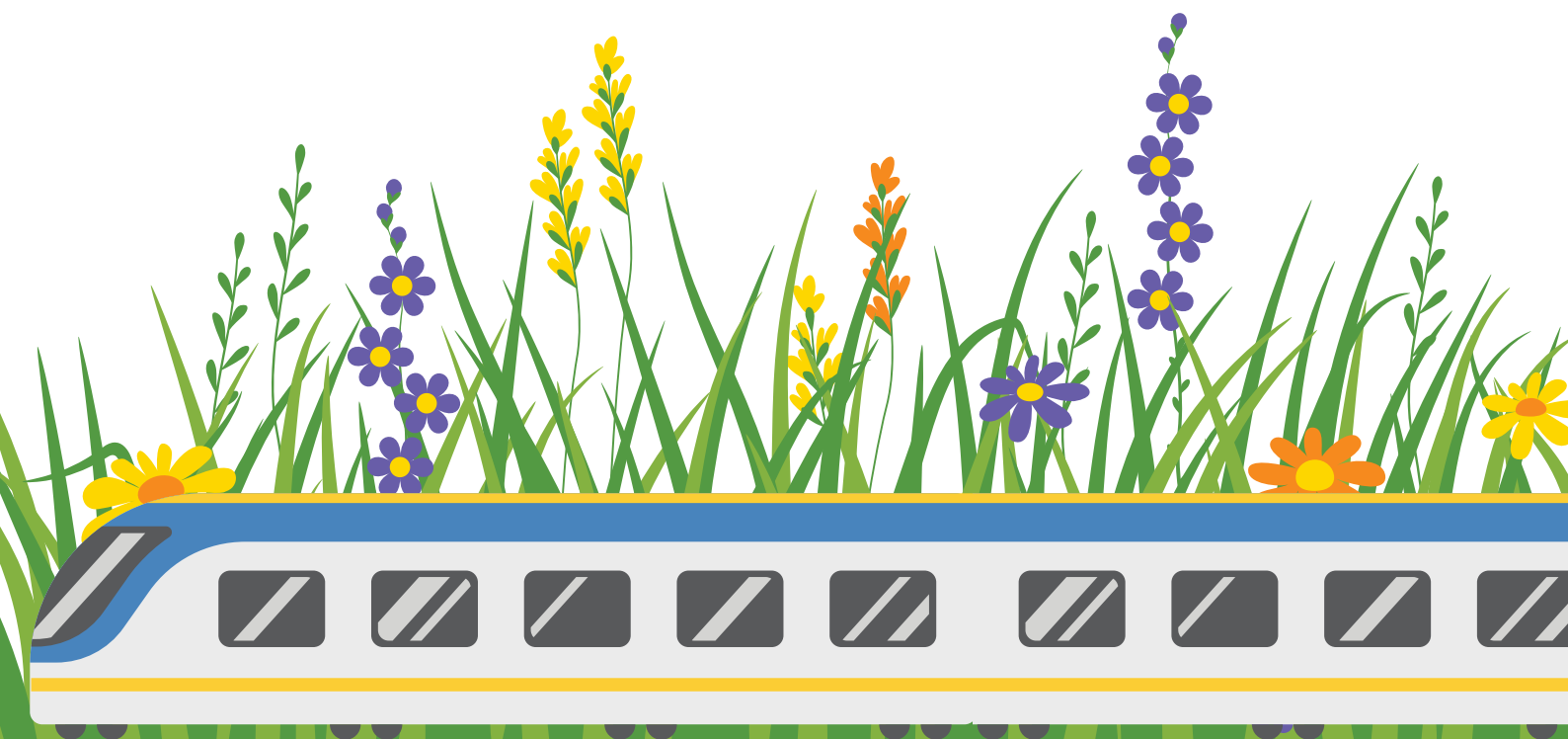




# **STATION ADOPTERS MONTHLY GROWING GUIDE**

## **FOR FLOWERS AND VEGETABLES**



# CONTENTS PAGE

3	Introduction
4	January
5	February
6	March
7	April
9	May
10	June
11	July
12	August
13	September
14	October
15	November
16	December
17	Crafts and activities month by month
20	Perennial flowers and herbs
21	Wildlife-friendly gardening
22	Climate-resistant gardening
23	Deterring pests and diseases
24	Pruning fruit trees
25	Pruning red currants

# INTRODUCTION

This monthly garden calendar guide is specifically created for Station Adopter groups supported by Lancashire Community Rail. For each month, there is a page of suggestions of what you could do at your station, including which flowers and vegetables to grow and their maintenance.

This booklet was made with Accrington Station in mind, but has been adapted to suit other stations. There are some amazingly organised groups along the line already, but we hope this guide will be helpful for groups just setting up. These are only suggestions, but please take from them what you like!

The guide also includes edibles, because what’s more welcoming when you get off a train than fresh food? Vegetables can also be used ornamentally to add height, shape, and texture to beds. Initiatives such as Incredible Edible also highlight the importance of freely available food in the community, and that it can bring communities together, just as stations can.



Rishton Station, March 2025

# WHAT TO DO IN JANUARY

## Flowers

- **Plant or move** any small ornamental bushes or roses.
- **Prune roses** and other plants with woody stems.
- **Plan what to grow** in each planter and which perennials to buy to plant in spring.

## Edibles

- **Winter-prune any fruit trees** to remove any dead, damaged, diseased, and crossing branches (instructions at end of booklet)
- Buy and **plant new bare-root fruit bushes** (e.g. blueberries, raspberries, and gooseberries) if the ground isn't frozen. These bushes are sold without soil around the roots and are cheaper than potted ones. To plant, dig a hole the size of the roots and firmly fill around the plant with compost and soil.
- **Plant a rhubarb crown** in a place where it won't need to be moved in the future.
- **Feed any spring cabbages** with high-nitrogen feed to encourage the leaves to grow.

## Maintenance

- **Look through seeds** from last year to see what you've still got and what you need to buy.
- **Sort through and clean pots** to stop plant disease from being passed on. This can be done in warm, soapy water with a scrubbing brush. Remove any broken pots, too.
- Put out seed or fat balls for the birds, and keep topping up water for them.
- **Avoid tidying winter stems too soon**, to provide shelter for wildlife. Solitary bees, for example, overwinter in tall grass stems.
- Check netting is in place over brassicas, such as kale, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage, to keep the pigeons out.



Remove all dead and diseased branches on woody stems.



Rhubarb is a brilliantly productive perennial, but crowns need to establish, so don't pick any stems in the first year. Put a sign up to remind station users of this.

# WHAT TO DO IN FEBRUARY

## Flowers

- **Remove any faded or yellowing leaves** from overwintering plants to prevent fungal diseases.

## Edibles

- **Sow broad beans**, beetroot, lettuces, radish, spinach, and chard in pots or trays indoors and let them grow.
- **Plant out shallots** and garlic, if none were planted in autumn.
- **Buy woodchip mulch** to put around the bottom of the apple tree in a doughnut shape (not touching the tree trunk).
- **Feed spring cabbages** with homemade nettle fertiliser. To make nettle fertiliser, pick nettles and soak them in a bucket of water for 4 weeks, then dilute by 1:10 to feed plants. Protect cabbages from pigeons using netting.
- Plant a rhubarb crown, if you haven't already.

## Maintenance

- Last chance to **prune fruit trees** and bushes, and plant trees and bushes.
- **Check seeds from old packets** by putting a few on damp kitchen paper to see if they germinate.
- Look into getting a **cold frame** to help harden off veg and flowers planted before the last frosts in mid-May.
- **Keep feeding the birds** as this is their toughest time of year.



Broad beans are short bean plants so only need a bamboo cane for support. They are frost-resistant so can be planted out early.



Doughnut mulch trees. If woodchip touches the bark it can cause infection.



Mustard and cress seeds can also be grown on the window ledge to provide some early microgreens.



# WHAT TO DO IN MARCH

## Flowers

- **Divide** clumps of herbaceous (non-woody) perennial plants, such as grasses, lupins, and alstroemeria, by digging them up and splitting the roots.
- **Sow annual flowers**, such as cosmos, lobelia, dahlias, and nasturtiums, in pots indoors and keep them warm to help them germinate.
- **Deadhead** (take off the dead flower heads) any daffodils so that they don't waste energy setting seed.

## Edibles

- **Plant potted soft fruit bushes** (not bareroot) such as currants, gooseberries, and raspberries from now onwards.
- **Plant onions**, shallots, and garlic sets.
- **Chit maincrop seed potatoes** by putting them in an egg carton or similar and sitting them on a sunny windowsill for a few weeks. This helps the shoots grow stronger once they are planted. Most potato varieties are planted in April or May and harvested in August or September. Potatoes could also be used to add height to the back of a flower border.
- **Protect brassicas** from pigeons using netting.
- **Harvest purple sprouting broccoli** just before it starts flowering. Wait until the main head has fully formed.

## Maintenance

- Prepare beds and planters for sowing by weeding them thoroughly, then cover with a thick layer of garden compost.



Buy seed potatoes and chit them on a window ledge.



Support the netting for spring cabbages and the purple sprouting broccoli with hoops or bent branches. Cover broad beans with frost-fleece this way too.

In Lancashire, frosts can occur until mid-May, so anything tender that is planted out needs to be protected.

# WHAT TO DO IN APRIL

## Flowers

- **Pick a planter to sow wildflower seeds** to support pollinators and other wildlife. If your station has a grassy area, consider creating a mini wildflower meadow. For this, seed mixes with yellow rattle are good to establish the meadow as it parasitises the grasses and weakens them, making space for wildflowers.
- Continue to **deadhead daffodils**, but leave the leaves to die back naturally for the bulb to store up energy.
- **Sow sweet peas** at the base of obelisk plant supports, or at the back of platform planters, to give them support as they grow.
- **Sow sunflowers in small pots indoors.** The sunflower Microsun Yellow (*Helianthus annuus*) grows to 30 to 40cm and has traditional sunflower-yellow petals.
- Lightly clip over the lavender bushes to help them keep their shape.
- Prick out small flower plants into small individual pots once they have their first set of true leaves, to give them more space. Keep them inside.
- **Plant out new perennials** while the ground is warm and damp.



Sunflower Ruby Passion (*Helianthus annuus*) grows up to 1m tall but could go at the back of planters.



Peas generally grow to about a metre tall, so need supports to climb up. Hazel branches with many twigs work well as they provide more structure for the plants.



Tomato plants can be pricked out when they reach this stage. They have one set of true leaves (serrated tomato-style leaves) as well as their seed leaves, which look very similar in leafy vegetables.



# WHAT TO DO IN APRIL

## Edibles

- **Plant out chitted potatoes.** Make a small trench, place potatoes 30cm apart, and pile earth on top of them to create rows.
- **Harvest the side shoots** of purple sprouting broccoli.
- **Harvest spring cabbages** once they have grown large enough.
- Put cardboard collars around the stems of cabbages to stop the cabbage root fly from laying their eggs
- Pinch out leaves of broad beans if they're covered in aphids, or **spray shoots** with soap or garlic-based solution (see back of booklet).
- **Divide clumps of hardy herbs**, such as lemon balm and chives, then replant.
- Plant out the young rocket and salad plants outside.
- **Sow outside:** beetroot, carrots, Swiss chard, summer cauliflower, kohlrabi, lettuce, leeks, radish, turnip, spring onions, peas, and perpetual spinach. Herb seeds can be sown in pots outside, too.
- Sow peas where they are going to stay: around an obelisk, or with bamboo canes and string as support.
- **Sow inside:** runner beans, French beans, courgettes, and pumpkins in pots to help them germinate.
- Plant tomato seedlings and pot them on when they have true leaves (their second set of leaves). Keep them inside.

## Maintenance

- Use fresh nettles to **make nettle fertiliser**. Collect a bucket full of nettle leaves, cover with water, and leave to stand for 4 weeks. Then dilute to feed plants. The fertiliser will be high in nitrogen, which is used by plants to grow leaves.
- Keep putting food out for birds while they raise their young.
- Take gardening gloves home to wash when they become too dirty.



Put the stinging nettle fertiliser in a corner of the garden to seep as it will smell awful.

# WHAT TO DO IN MAY

## Flowers

- After hardening off, **plant out the cosmos, dahlia, nasturtium, and sunflower plants** that have been growing inside, or sow seeds straight into the soil. Pick a sunny spot for the sunflowers. Keep well watered.
- **Lift and divide overcrowded clumps of daffodils** once the leaves have died off.

## Edibles

- **Start harvesting rhubarb stems**, but not in the first year of the plant's growth. This allows it to fully establish. Water rhubarb plants with nettle liquid fertiliser.
- **Plant out** runner bean, French bean, courgette, and pumpkin plants into the garden. Try to bring the plants outside every so often before planting to 'harden them off' to outside temperatures, which will increase their survival rates. French and runner beans can be sown straight into the ground too. Protect them with frost fleece if there is a cold snap.
- **Move tomato seedlings** into larger pots and feed them with nettle feed or tomato feed (which gives them the phosphates that they need to produce flowers and fruit). Keep them well watered, and move them outside after the last frost.
- **Earth up the potatoes** by covering the shoots with soil as they appear. This increases the length of the stem underground so that the plant will grow more potatoes.
- **Sow salad leaf** seeds in gaps in the beds.
- Weed around the vegetables and keep seedlings well watered.



Pumpkins need a lot of nutrients, so it is best to plant them in a heap of compost.

## Maintenance

- **Tidy and decorate the station** ready for Community Rail Week!
- **Check plants for pests**, especially on shoot tips and the underside of leaves. These can be treated with garlic or soap solution deterrent spray (see back of booklet).



# WHAT TO DO IN JUNE

## Flowers

- Put **supporting bamboo stakes** in place for tall plants such as sunflowers, dahlias, and cosmos.
- **Weed the platform planters** to keep them looking good. Some self-seeded plants might add to the display and provide nectar and pollen for insects.
- Buy and **plant any extra annual flowers** to fill up the beds.
- **Deadhead flowers** to encourage new growth.

## Edibles

- **Harvest** lettuce, radish, and peas.
- **Pinch out the side shoots of tomatoes**, so they put more energy into the fruit. Side shoots grow from the joint between the leaf and stem at a 45-degree angle.
- To increase the yield, **feed flowering vegetable plants** (tomatoes, courgettes, and pumpkins) with tomato food.
- **Start harvesting** any summer fruiting raspberries and strawberries. Put straw around the strawberries to stop them from touching the soil and growing mould.

## Maintenance

- **Water beds and planters** (especially vertical planters), and hand-weed round vegetables to help them establish.
- To stop the plants from wilting between watering, **mulch around beans and courgettes** to keep water in the soil.



Keeping a low ground cover of salad leaves around other vegetables in the beds reduces water loss and stops the soil from drying out as much.

Removing the side shoots (those at a 45-degree angle) of tomato plants also reduces their water loss.



# WHAT TO DO IN JULY

## Flowers

- **Deadhead flowers** to encourage new growth.
- Weed platform planters every few weeks. Look out for coltsfoot, bindweed, and horsetail, which take over.
- **Remove seed pods from sweet peas** to keep them flowering for longer.

## Edibles

- **Stop harvesting rhubarb** to let it collect enough energy for winter hibernation.
- Continue harvesting summer fruiting raspberries and strawberries.
- **Harvest courgettes**, French and runner beans, and peas.
- Put fine netting or fleece over brassicas to stop butterflies laying their eggs on them and protect them from caterpillars.
- **Sow a last batch of peas**, which can be harvested in the autumn.
- Cut the broad bean stems after the last harvest, but leave the roots in the soil to release nitrogen as they decompose.

## Maintenance

- Water plants in the morning or evening. Avoid the hottest part of the day to reduce the water lost by evaporation.
- **Install a bird bath** (this could be an old plate) for birds to drink from.



Harvest courgettes before they grow into marrows.



Horsetail is native to the UK but can grow up to 2m deep underground and spreads using rhizomes, meaning that it can easily take over large areas.



By adding a few stones to the bird bath, it means that small insects, like bees, can drink from it too.

# WHAT TO DO IN AUGUST

## Flowers

- **Continue deadheading** flowers to extend flowering.
- Leave some dead flower heads to form seed so that this can be collected for next year.

## Edibles

- **Keep harvesting** courgettes, beans and peas, tomatoes, etc., as they become ripe.
- **Sow rocket seeds** in seed trays. Rocket grows quickly, so can be planted out and harvested before the end of the year.
- Harvest onions, shallots, and garlic once their stems have wilted and folded over. This shows that they have stopped growing.
- Once all raspberries have fruited, use secateurs to **cut out the old woody canes** that bore fruit this year. Leave this year's fresh green growth, which will bear fruit next year.
- **Remove the top shoots of tomatoes** to stop more growing, and remove the lower leaves to help the fruit ripen.
- Let some lettuce and radish plants grow taller and 'bolt' to form seeds that can later be collected.
- **Sow spring cabbage** in pots to plant out in autumn.



Cut old raspberry canes right to the ground. Don't put these in the compost bin as they're too woody and don't break down. Instead, make a pile of woody material for insects to enjoy.

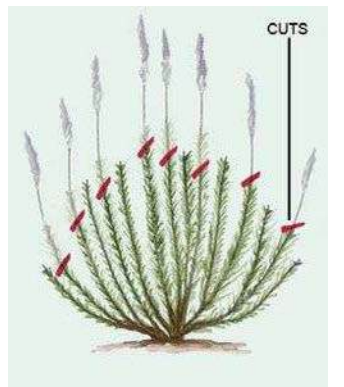
## Maintenance

- Continue to water the beds if it is dry.
- **Turn compost** to aerate it and speed up decomposition.

# WHAT TO DO IN SEPTEMBER

## Flowers

- **Prune** the long, flowering stalks of lavender plants back to the first leaf. This stops them from becoming woody too fast.
- **Collect ripe seeds** of some annual flowers to save and re-sow next year. For example, sweet peas, marigolds, cosmos, dahlias, rudbeckia, etc. Store them in a paper bag or envelope to help them dry. Leave sunflower seedheads for the birds to feed on.
- **Sow seeds of hardy annuals**, like scabiosa and cornflowers, which will flower early next summer.
- **Plant new perennials** to let them establish before the first frosts in October.
- **Plant spring bulbs**, including crocuses, daffodils, hyacinths, English bluebells, and snake's-head fritillaries.



Prune the lavender plant back into a ball shape by only removing the flowering stems.

## Edibles

- **Harvest** any apples and potatoes.
- **Cut off the vines of unripe tomatoes** and take them home to ripen indoors. Use green tomatoes to make tomato chutney.
- **Sow kale** for winter picking.
- **Move some herbs into pots** to take indoors.
- Cut away any leaves covering pumpkins and marrows to let the skins ripen in the sun.

## Maintenance

- **Maintain wildflower patches** by performing their annual cut. Rake off the cut material, as wildflowers grow best on soil with low nutrients. Choose some less accessible areas to leave the grass long, to provide shelter for overwintering insects and amphibians.



# WHAT TO DO IN OCTOBER

## Flowers

- **Buy and plant winter flowers** such as winter-flowering heather, cyclamen, winter pansies, and hellebores.
- **Sow green manure**, such as clover, brown mustard, or tillage radish, onto empty beds to protect the soil from winter rain. The plants can then be turned back into the soil in the spring to fertilise it.

## Edibles

- **Sow hardy broad beans** for early crops next year.
- Harvest the last of the salad plants before the first frost.
- **Finish picking runner beans** and French beans, but leave a few pods to ripen fully, to save the seeds.
- **Plant garlic cloves**, 15cm apart, with their tips 5cm below the surface. These can be harvested next year. Shop-bought garlic cloves work well. Onions can also be planted and overwintered under fleece.
- **Harvest pumpkins** and marrows near the end of the month, once the stalk has completely died off.
- Plant out spring cabbages for next year and cover with netting to deter pigeons.

## Maintenance

- **Make a leaf mould bin** out of four posts and some chicken wire. Collect leaves and put them into the bin, where they will break down to be used as compost later.
- Stop mowing the lawn till next spring, or raise the height of the blades.



Leaf mould is great for plants than need drainage and can be added to compost to pot on plants.

Clover is a nitrogen fixator so makes nitrogen available in the soil for other plants to use.



# WHAT TO DO IN NOVEMBER

## Flowers

- **Plant tulip bulbs** for next spring.
- **Clear away sweet peas** and take their supports down to use next year.
- **Move or plant** any new trees or shrubs now that they are dormant.

## Edibles

- **Harvest any leeks** once they are large enough and look like they have stopped growing.
- **Cover any strawberry plants** with frost fleece to protect them from the cold. Or replot them and move them indoors.
- **Cover purple sprouting broccoli** with netting to deter pigeons from pecking at it.

## Maintenance

- **Continue collecting fallen leaves** for the leaf mould pile.
- **Start feeding the birds** in the colder months.



Harvest leeks before they start flowering.

Bushes, trees, and soft fruit plants can be moved between November and February, while they are dormant, but it is best to move them earlier so that their roots have time to establish.





# WHAT TO DO IN DECEMBER

## Flowers

- **Look over the station planters** to make sure they're all tidy.

## Edibles

- **Prune any redcurrants.** (see back of booklet).
- Lift and divide established clumps of rhubarb (at least 4 years old). Replant the outer sections into holes filled with soil and compost.
- **Keep cabbage, kale, and purple sprouting broccoli covered** in net to protect them from hungry pigeons. Remove yellow leaves.
- Harvest any remaining leeks and some kale. Leave any purple sprouting broccoli and spring cabbage to grow till next year.

## Maintenance

- **Continue feeding birds** and collecting leaves.
- **Keep filling up the bird bath** with water and break any ice on it to let the birds drink.
- **Litter pick** the platforms if needed.



Accrington station has currant bushes in the platform planters to add interest and height. Currant bushes also have pretty flowers in late spring!

# CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES MONTH BY MONTH

## January

- Take part in the **RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch** at the station by watching and recording birds for an hour. The RSPB has an ID sheet to record bird species, and the results can be submitted to them to help track how birds in the UK are faring.



## February

- Use twigs blown down by winter winds to **make a string weaving** to decorate the garden. Tie the sticks together in an X shape, then loop the string around each stick in turn, working in a circle. Search for Mexican Gods Eyes for more info on this craft.



## March

- Make **wildflower seed bombs** to plant in March and April. Mix a teaspoon of wildflower seeds with 2 tablespoons of sand and knead into a golf-ball-sized lump of clay (try to use potters' clay, as air-drying clay has nylon in it). Then split it into small marble-sized balls to dry. To use, throw the seed bombs at hard ground so that they smash or crumble in your hand before distributing.



## April

- **Try leaf bashing** to make prints of fresh leaves on fabric. Pick a leaf and lay it between a piece of fabric and a hard surface (such as a short plank of wood). Then use a hammer to gently tap onto the fabric where the leaf is, to release the pigment in the leaf. Cotton-rich fabric works best. The fabric pieces could be used to make mini flags or bunting.



# CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES BY MONTH

## May

- Try out **nature journaling**, within in the station garden or somewhere else. Take some time to write or draw in response to something natural that takes your interest. You could start by looking at an area as a whole and then zoom in on a specific object, shape or colour, for example. Focus on capturing the shapes and colours rather than how realistic the drawing looks.
- Harvest rhubarb at least a year after it has been planted and make a **rhubarb crumble** or compote.



## June

- Boil and peel harvested broad beans, and mash with soft cheese, lemon juice, and mint to **make broad bean dip**. Try it alongside other dips and have a picnic as a group.



## July

- Take part in the **UK Big Butterfly Count** by recording butterflies you see in the garden for 20 minutes. Search for the Big Butterfly Count for ID sheets. The results of the survey feed into a national database to show how the UK's butterflies are faring.

## August

- Use a reclaimed shipping pallet to **make vertical pallet planters**. These can be attached to walls and fences, allowing for planters even on narrow platforms. Use a hammer and crowbar to remove three slats from the top of the pallet and attach them to the side of the supports on the bottom of the pallet, to form the base of the planters. Paint with bright outdoor wood paint to help protect the wood, and to add colour to the platform!



# CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES BY MONTH

## September

- Cut **bundles of herbs** before they die back. Leave them upside down to dry out and hang around the house for fragrance and decoration. Lavender flowers can be collected when pruning the lavender bushes.
- Collect some flowers from the station planters and press them.



Use pressed flowers to decorate cards and gift tags.

## October

- **Make rosehip chutney** from rosehips on or around the station, if there are any. Collect 200g of rosehips from the garden and surrounding area, then cut each one open and rinse the inside to remove the seeds and hairs. Add 1 chopped apple, 1 chopped red onion, 2 garlic cloves, 50g sugar, 50ml apple cider or balsamic vinegar, 200ml water, and some seasoning, and simmer for around 45 minutes until everything is cooked through.

## November

- **Make a mini pond** in a quiet, sunny spot by putting stones in a washing-up bowl to create a slope out of the bowl to let animals escape from it. Let rainwater fill the pond, and add a pond plant such as starwort or miniature water lily. This is a brilliant way to almost instantly create more habitat for wildlife. More information here: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-create-mini-pond>



## December

- **Make a pinecone bird feeder**. Collect pinecones, and tie a piece of string to the top of each pinecone. Mix birdseed, cheese, and raisins with lard (replace with peanut butter or coconut oil if wanted) and press the mixture around the pinecone to make a ball.





# PERENNIAL FLOWERS AND HERBS FOR PLATFORM PLANTERS

Having perennial shrubs, flowers, and herbs in the platform planters gives them height all year round and means less maintenance and planting in the spring. It also saves money as perennial plants last a few years. Hardy perennial plants are the best as they survive outside over winter and so don't need to be moved.

Hardy perennial plants include lavender, salvias, asters, some verbenas, geums, and Lady's Mantle, as well as:



Euphorbia mini martini variety only grows to around 60cm tall.



'Gallery' dwarf lupins only grow to 50cm tall.



Periwinkle is an evergreen ground cover plant with flowers all summer.



Dwarf alstroemeria grow to 30cm tall and come in many colours.



Rosemary can be pruned into a small bush, is edible, and has flowers.



Lemonbalm forms a small bush and is edible. It has white flowers in summer.



Chives are edible and have lovely flowers. Other ornamental alliums are taller.



Blue fescue grass grows to a 15-30cm diameter ball.

# WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY GARDENING

## Pollinator-friendly planting

Pollinators include bees, wasps, butterflies, flies, and moths. 88% of all flowering plant species depend on pollinators for reproduction, including 75% of all crop species (Nature Communications (1018), 2019). They also provide a food source for birds, bats, and spiders, forming the foundation for our ecosystem. Pollinators need frequent nectar sources to keep flying, so, in urban spaces, they rely on pockets of flowers.

Wildflowers and traditional 'weeds' are the best for pollinators, as they have simple flowers and pollinators can't access the nectar in the centre of the flower. Specially bred double-petaled flowers are too full to allow access to their centre, so are useless as a nectar source. Creating a mini wildflower meadow or leaving grass long is therefore the best way to support them. Cumbria Wildflowers is a great (relatively) local provider of wildflower seeds. They only use native plants, which are best for our native pollinators. For station planters, ornamental pollinator-friendly flowers include:



Hardy geranium



Lavender



Helenium



Verbena bonariensis



Heather

## Winter food plants

Fruit-bearing trees, including hawthorn, blackthorn, and crab apple, are brilliant for birds. Garden flowers that also provide winter food are teasel, asters, and sunflowers, as the birds can peck at the seed heads. Climbing plants like honeysuckle and ivy also provide shelter.

## Ponds

The best areas for wildlife provide a mosaic of habitats - such as short grass, long grass, and scrub - and a pond adds a whole new dynamic by providing water. The November 'crafts and activity' explains how to build a mini pond.



# CLIMATE-RESISTANT GARDENING

As climate change continues to affect the planet, the North West of England is already experiencing wetter winters, higher overall temperatures, and lower summer rainfall. Extreme events such as summer droughts and winter storms are forecast to become more frequent and severe (Greater Manchester Climate Change Risk Assessment, Oct. 2024). Therefore, changing our planting and gardening practices is imperative.

## Drought-resistant gardening

Reducing our stations' dependence on water is key.

- Install a water butt to catch runoff from platform shelters or other nearby buildings (with permission) to use for watering.
- Plant drought-tolerant flowers such as echinacea, nepeta, and verben. Perennials are also less vulnerable as they don't need as much water to establish each year.
- Cover all bare soil to reduce water loss. Sow nasturtium, creeping thyme, salad leaves, or clover to grow around flowers and vegetables in planters.



Some stations have information signs for rail users to read while they wait, educating people on drought- or pollinator-friendly planting.

## Winter rain-resistant gardening

Bare soil is very vulnerable during winter storms, as nutrients are likely to leak out of it due to heavy rainfall. Beds can either be covered by plastic or by sowing cover crops such as crimson clover, brown mustard, tillage radish, or hairy vetch. These protect the soil from erosion, loosen the soil with their roots, and can also be dug into the soil in the spring to improve fertility (especially clover, as it adds nitrogen to the soil).

## Compost

Creating your own compost recycles nutrients in the garden. Turn the compost every 4 months to increase airflow, then add it to beds before planting. Woody material can be collected in a pile in a hidden corner, if possible, to provide habitat for invertebrates. If you do buy compost, please check that it is peat-free, and therefore not contributing to the degradation of peat bogs, which are one of our most important carbon sinks.

# DETECTING PESTS AND DISEASES

- Check young plants for infections often and remove leaves with large numbers of eggs on them.
- Remove slugs and caterpillars by hand and wash off large aphid colonies using a hose. Spraying garlic water (boil garlic cloves in water and let it cool) onto leaves also helps deter slugs.
- When growing carrots, plant the seeds apart so that they don't need to be thinned while they grow. If carrots are disturbed during growing, they will attract carrot flies, which will destroy the carrots. Carrot flies can also be deterred by covering carrots in very fine mesh, or growing them in raised beds, as carrot flies only fly near the ground.
- When choosing potato and tomato varieties, pick ones that are resistant to blight. (Such as 'Sarpio Mira' and 'Orla' for potatoes, and 'Crimson Cherry F1' and 'Merrygold F1' for tomatoes.)



Long grass supports the entire ecosystem.



Simple marigold varieties allow pollinators to reach their nectar.

- Attract natural predators such as ladybirds, lacewings, and hoverflies to eat aphids. Hoverflies have short tongues, so need open flowers like daisies, dandelions, and cow parsley, which have easily accessible pollen and nectar. Leaving grass on the edges of the garden long is a great way to encourage these wildflowers.
- Try adding a tiny pond to the garden (look at the seasonal activities for more info) to attract birds, toads, and frogs and hedgehogs to the garden, which feed on slugs and snails.
- Grow companion plants alongside vegetables. Basil, marigold, mint, and lavender repel pests with their strong scents and attract pollinators.
- Weed around plants and give them enough space to create good airflow, which reduces the risk of leaf mould and disease.
- Change the location of crops you plant each year to disrupt pest and disease cycles in the soil.



# PRUNING FRUIT TREES

Pruning helps to regulate the growth of the tree, prevent fruit tree diseases, and encourage more fruit to grow.

## When to prune

Any time from November to early March, while the tree is dormant and before it starts to grow. Don't prune if it will be frosty or very wet in the next few days, as the tree will not heal as well.

## How to make a cut

Use sharp secateurs or loppers and a pruning saw for larger branches. Prune as close to the main branch as possible, without damaging the branch. Cutting further away will leave a 'snag' which is likely to become infected and spread the infection to the rest of the tree. If the cut is facing upwards, cut it at a 45-degree angle so that rain water can run off it.

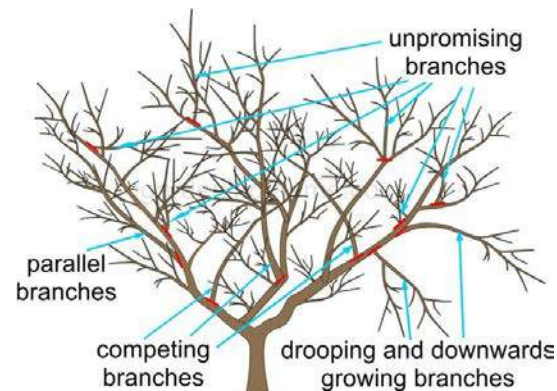
## Pruning

Start by looking at the tree to decide which branches to take off. These can be marked using a piece of string if you're not cutting straight away. Start by taking the dead, diseased, and damaged branches off. Then follow these steps:

1. Take off branches that are crossing other branches, causing rubbing.
2. Remove larger side branches growing inwards. The aim is to create an open-centred, goblet-shaped crown to increase airflow. There should be 50-60cm space between the main branches (halfway up the branch).
3. Prune downward-growing branches back to a more upward-growing branch, or to the main stem.
4. If the tree is too tall or wide, shorten larger branches by up to a third. Prune to a strong outward- and upward-facing side-branch that's at least one-third of the diameter of the branch being pruned.

Never cut more than a fifth of the branches in one year. While pruning, step back regularly to make sure you really want to remove particular branches.

There is a very good apple tree pruning video on the RHS website:  
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/fruit/apples/pruning-made-easy>



# PRUNING REDCURRANT BUSHES

Pruning helps to keep the plant healthy and encourages more fruit to grow in the next year. Removing side shoots also stops the branches from becoming overcrowded, which prevents pests and diseases.

When pruning, you're aiming to make an open-centred bush shape, with eight to ten well-spaced main branches radiating from a short trunk. Each of these branches has short side-shoots, which are where the fruit will grow next year.

## When to prune

It's best to prune redcurrants in the winter (between December and March) while they are dormant, and before the first shoots start to appear. Avoid pruning if it's likely to be frosty in the next few days, as this can damage the plant, although currants are generally hardy.

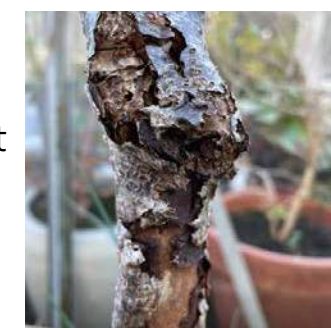
## Steps of pruning:

- Using secateurs, remove any dead or damaged branches.
- Remove any low-growing branches that are getting in the way of other plants.
- Choose strong side shoots to replace old branches and cut the old branches down to these shoots. Remove one or two of the older branches per year in this way, to encourage regeneration.
- Prune back all other side shoots growing from the main branches to one or two buds.

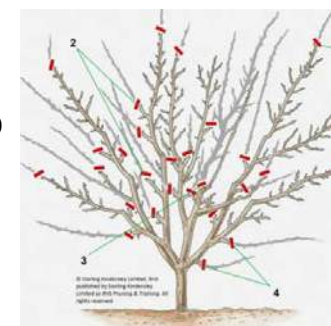
For more information on this, visit the RHS website:  
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/fruit/redcurrants/redcurrant-pruning-and-training>



The aim of winter pruning is to remove dead, diseased and damaged wood, and open up the bush.



Dark bark patches, scars, and flaking bark show dead and diseased wood.



Only remove up to a third of the plant to allow it to recover.









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