**October**

With autumn well under way, October is usually a month full of chilly mornings and spooky nights – the kind of weather that puts you in mind of hot mugs of tea, bowls of soup and if you’re an allotment gardener, lots of lovely winter digging! Remember that the clocks go back an hour at the end of this month so grab every minute of daylight on the allotment that you can before the dark days of winter are upon us.

**Harvesting**

Every child loves to make a Jack o’ Lantern, so harvest your pumpkins and squashes now. Any that aren’t used for Halloween will make a perfect supper. If any outdoor tomatoes are left, collect the fruit and place them in a drawer or shoe box to complete their ripening, but don’t forget to check on them from time to time! Early leeks can be lifted now because they are less hardy than the later cultivars. Maincrop potatoes must be got out of the ground before the end of the month using a potato or garden fork to lift them to prevent damaging the tubers. Harvest the last of the peas and runner bean crop for this year, and keep harvesting chard, spinach, carrots, celeriac, lettuce and the Oriental vegetables. Also, lift and store any Florence fennel bulbs before they are damaged by frost.

**Sowing and Planting**

Sow winter lettuce and a couple of short rows of winter hardy peas and broad beans towards the end of the month to provide you with an early crop next Spring.

Plant out Spring cabbage and **overwintering** types of onion and garlic. It is also a good time to plant rhubarb crowns.

**General**

Rough dig over heavy ground and leave it in lumps or ridges to be broken down gradually by the winter frosts and rain. Keep off the soil if it is wet and don’t be tempted dig it if it is frozen. When to soil is frozen hard it is a good opportunity to cart barrows of manure or compost over it.

Insulate your greenhouse before using it to protect the your more tender plants using horticultural fleece or plastic bubble sheeting; newspaper is an excellent substitute if you lay several layers over your most precious plants whenever a frost is forecast. It is also a good idea to wrap their pots in bubble wrap to insulate their roots.

The last couple of winters have been cruelly hard. Be prepared to protect chard plants, spinach, winter lettuce, peas, broad beans and any other crops that you are overwintering from the worst of the winter weather. Keep some fleece, plastic or have cloches nearby ready to use.

Clean and clear the plot of spent crops and take down the runner bean poles, cleaning the soil off the bottom of them before storing them somewhere cool and airy ready to use next year.

Stake Brussels sprouts and sprouting broccoli plants to prevent them from being blown over in strong winds, it is also worthwhile dragging soil up around the base of the plants to give them extra support.