



## What exactly do gardeners do in winter?

*Winter gardening: think all activity is halted? Think again! Winter gardening isn't just obsession – it allows us to sit pretty come spring.*

*Arguing this point is Jack Wallington, an RHS qualified garden designer based in Clapham. His self-confessed 'bordering on obsession' love of garden design resulted in his South London garden being featured on the BBC's Big Dreams, Small Spaces. Here, he discusses what gardeners really get up to during those cold winter months.*

### **The myth surrounding winter gardening**

It's the myth that plagues gardeners up and down the country. Days are shorter and leaves have fallen from trees. Suddenly we're being told "it must be nice now everything's stopped for winter."

Wait, what?! Winter is as busy a period for a gardener as any, with many a summer time problem occurring when people take their foot off the pedal in the colder months.

So, let's blast the pants off this myth once and for all with a quick run through of the things I get up to in the winter (gardening-wise, that is...). Please add to the list in the comments.

### **Winter gardening: What I get up to Pruning**

Not all trees, climbers and shrubs are pruned in winter. But for many, the time to shape and prune is when they're dormant. Apples, pears, many roses, type 2 and 3 Clematis, Sambucus, Buddleia and autumn fruiting raspberries are among the key candidates.

Fail to prune in winter and you'll be pruning for failure later in the year. Ever wondered why something doesn't flower or looks horrible? Don't say I didn't warn you.

### **Cutting Back**

I tend to leave most herbaceous border plants standing over winter until they look really tatty and torn up by winds, clipping a bit here and a bit there as the months pass.

You can of course cut it all back at the start of winter or at the end too in one sweep. The important thing is that it's done at some point. This is to prevent pests and diseases hiding in the decaying leaves and stems.

## **Tidying**

Someone once told me that “gardening is basically cleaning outside and just as satisfying”.

They were pretty much right – nothing can zhoosh up a garden more than a tidy. Especially in winter when dearest Mother Nature is literally tipping bags of leaves and other rubbish over our fences.

## **Planting**

Aha! This is the one most people forget. Not only planting bulbs and bedding at the start of the season. Winter is the time to plant bare root plants like raspberry canes, fruit trees and hedging.

So much time is spent on getting this task right. And it is of course much cheaper to buy bare root than potted plants.

What exactly do gardeners do in winter: Sterilising pots

## **Cleaning tools**

Winter is the time to clean and tidy all tools, workspaces, greenhouses, etc. The more tools ya got, the more time it's gonna take. It's vital you do it, however, as pots, spades, shoes and glass panes all house fungal, viral and bacterial pests as well as insects.

I like to try and complete all of the cleaning as early as I can into winter to let the cold weather really finish the job on any critters I miss.

## **Weeding**

Generally, we all weed as we go along through the year, however, in autumn some hardy weeds like Couch Grass will make a valiant attempt to leap through your borders, sending runners everywhere.

Winter is the best time to work through borders, weeding out every last perennial weed you can spot.

## **Repair**

Fences, climbing plant structures, walls, plant supports, painted surfaces, etc – they're all easier to see and get to when plants are dormant. Not to mention problems are visible and therefore adding to winter mess.

Get in there during good weather and repair as much as you can ahead of the spring madness.

What exactly do gardeners do in winter: House Plants

## **Indoor gardening**

The amount of plants I have in the house rivals the number most people have outside.

Admittedly no one else would be so stupid to create as much work for themselves but winter is the prime time to turn attention to house plants, giving them a once over for issues, tidying dead leaves and thinking about repotting toward the end of winter.

What exactly do gardeners do in winter: Planning

## **Planning**

It's true that slightly less work is done outside in winter. This is mostly due to the severe lack of daylight with possible working hours significantly reduced. Inside however there is a mountain of paperwork to catch up on.

For professionals it's generally the best time to catch up on financial admin, but for professionals and hobbyists alike, winter is also the time to firm up plans for the coming gardening year.

Planning could take the form of notes on a scrap of paper with a glass of wine to a full blown planting plan and spreadsheet. Either way you need these early so that you can...

## **...Order seeds and plants**

Now is the time to get ahead by ordering all of your seeds and plants for spring, setting your gardening year up for success and making sure you order some of the rarer and more limited plants before they sell out. Let's face it though, none of us really mind going on a bit of shopping spree.

Phew! I need a gin and tonic just thinking about that lot. Except I can't because I need to finish off the plan for my allotment. And buy some more seeds. I need to order some gooseberry bushes too. Oh, and I really need to paint our windows and think about cut flowe... damn it!

By Jack Wallington

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