

Growing Britain

The Autumn Equinox Edition

Week beginning 20 September 2026

This is the week the season formally turns.

The autumn equinox arrives on 23 September, marking one of the most noticeable transitions in the growing year. The days shorten, temperatures begin to soften, hedgerows become heavy with fruit and the garden starts reallocating its energy.

This is a season of gathering, storing and preparing.

It is also a reminder that productive landscapes rarely stop. They change function.

The vegetable bed becomes winter food or green manure. Fallen leaves become soil. Seeds become next year's plants. Hedgerows become feeding stations for migrating birds.



This week's Growing Britain theme

Store. Cover. Connect.

What to grow this week



September remains an active growing month across much of the UK, although timing will vary between regions and according to local weather. Check conditions for your area with our free [Weather for Growers tool](#).

Sow now

There is still time to sow:

- Spinach
- Winter lettuce
- Rocket
- Lamb's lettuce
- Hardy salad leaves
- Green manures

Green manure is particularly useful on ground that will otherwise remain empty until spring.

Winter tares, grazing rye and Italian ryegrass can help protect soil from erosion, hold nutrients and keep living roots within the soil system.

Plant

This is a good time for:

- Overwintering onion sets
- Spring cabbages raised earlier in the summer
- Strawberry plants and rooted runners

Protect newly planted brassicas where pigeons are a problem and keep an eye on freshly planted onion sets until their roots become established.

Harvest

The growing year is still providing plenty.

Depending on where you are in the UK, harvests may include:

- Apples
- Pears
- Autumn raspberries
- Blackberries
- Beans
- Courgettes
- Beetroot
- Tomatoes
- Potatoes
- Squash
- Pumpkins

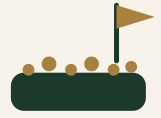
Harvest little and often.

Apples deserve particular attention now. A single tree can provide blossom, insects, fruit and habitat across the year, which makes it one of the most generous plants any growing space can hold. Fallen fruit has value too, in the kitchen and for wildlife.

Use surplus produce for freezing, drying, preserving, chutneys, sauces and jams, or share it with neighbours, community groups and food-growing projects.

The RHS's [September growing guide](#) covers the full list of the month's jobs.

Give every piece of soil a winter job



As beds begin to empty, there is often an instinct to clear everything.

Try something different.

Label each area according to what it will do next:

Food | Soil | Wildlife | Habitat

A bed might produce winter spinach.

Another could grow green manure.

Another might receive compost and mulch.

A small edge could remain undisturbed for insects and wildlife.

Bare soil is vulnerable to rain, erosion, nutrient loss and compaction.

Keeping the ground covered also creates a more active soil ecosystem through winter.

Regenerative growing: think in systems

A regenerative growing space does more than produce vegetables.

It stores water. It builds soil. It feeds insects. It supports birds. It provides habitat. It captures carbon. It creates food.

And ideally, those functions reinforce one another.

One of permaculture's most useful principles is:

Integrate rather than segregate

Rather than creating one isolated wildlife corner, think about how wildlife can become part of the productive landscape itself.

Could herbs be allowed to flower for pollinators?

Could fruit bushes provide shelter for birds?

Could a compost area sit beside dead wood habitat?

Could a boundary hedge provide food for people, nesting habitat and autumn berries for wildlife?

Could rainwater be slowed and directed towards planting areas?

The aim is to create relationships.

Nature rarely works through isolated components.

Hedgerows are infrastructure



Britain's hedgerows are among the most valuable ecological structures in our landscape.

A mature mixed hedge can provide:

- Nesting habitat
- Shelter
- Food
- Wildlife corridors
- Carbon storage
- Wind protection
- Water regulation
- Shade
- Pollinator habitat

Hedgerows also connect fragmented habitats.

That connection matters.

A woodland may support wildlife. A meadow may support wildlife. A pond may support wildlife.

Connect them through hedgerows, river corridors and other habitats and animals can begin moving safely between them.

The same idea works on a much smaller scale in gardens, allotments and community growing spaces.

Growing Britain is ultimately about connected landscapes as much as individual plots.

And this thinking is spreading. Traditional hedge laying is enjoying a genuine revival among farmers, with around 2,500 applying for government grants this year to restore roughly 1,300 km of mature hedgerow, and a further 5,000 applications to plant about 2,500 km of new hedges. One Yorkshire farmer described hedge laying as a gateway into wider conservation, and the enthusiasm is travelling from farm to farm. [The Guardian has the full story.](#)

Soil health: leave something behind



Autumn garden clearing can remove enormous quantities of biological material.

Some clearing is necessary, especially where plants are diseased.

Healthy material, however, can often stay within the system.

Consider:

- Leaving healthy roots in the ground
- Composting vegetable material
- Leaving selected seedheads standing
- Retaining hollow stems through winter
- Building log or branch piles
- Mulching bare soil
- Making leaf mould
- Sowing green manure

Healthy soil is alive.

It contains fungi, bacteria, worms, insects and other organisms continuously breaking material down and cycling nutrients.

Feeding that system is one of the best investments we can make in future food production.

One more soil job worth adding to the autumn list: remove plastic. A five-year European research project found microplastics in every one of the 227 agricultural fields it tested across 11 countries, and warned that the particles can carry pesticides, microbes and other pollutants through the soil. Old netting, plant labels, degraded sheeting and broken pot fragments are all worth recovering from beds while they are being cleared. [More on the research here.](#)

September's wild harvest



September is one of Britain's most abundant foraging months.

Hedgerows can contain an extraordinary variety of food.

Rosehips

Dog rose hips usually ripen from September into November, and they are notably rich in vitamin C.

They have traditionally been used in:

- Syrups
- Teas
- Jellies
- Preserves

The hairs surrounding the seeds can be irritating, so rosehips require careful preparation and fine straining.

Hawthorn

Hawthorn berries, or haws, are now colouring strongly.

They can be used in cooked preparations such as:

- Jellies
- Sauces
- Chutneys
- Vinegars

Hawthorn is also exceptionally important for wildlife, supporting more than 300 insect species as well as providing food and shelter for birds and mammals.

Blackberries

Blackberries remain plentiful in many areas.

Use them for:

- Crumbles
- Compote
- Jam
- Syrup
- Vinegar
- Freezing

Leave plenty behind for wildlife.

Elderberries

Elderberries are now ripe in many parts of the UK.

They should be cooked before eating.

Traditionally they have been used in syrups, jellies and preserves.

Hazelnuts

Hazelnuts are ripening through September and into October.

Look for papery husks beginning to pull away from the nut.

Squirrels, mice and many other animals depend on them too, so harvest lightly.

Sloes

Sloes begin reaching their main picking period towards the end of September and through autumn.

Their intensely sharp flavour makes them better suited to preserves and infusions than eating raw.

Forage carefully

Wild food can help reconnect us with the landscape, but responsible harvesting matters.

Follow a few simple principles:

- Identify plants with complete confidence
- Never eat something because an app says it is edible
- Avoid polluted roadsides and contaminated land
- Check whether collecting is permitted
- Avoid uprooting wild plants
- Take only a small amount
- Leave plenty for wildlife
- Harvest only what you will use

With fungi in particular, learning and photographing can be every bit as rewarding as collecting.

Autumn fungi often reveal the enormous hidden biological networks beneath woodland floors.

Fungi season begins



Rain followed by mild autumn temperatures can trigger dramatic fungal fruiting.

Look for fungi on:

- Fallen logs
- Tree stumps
- Woodland floors
- Grassland
- Old trees
- Leaf litter

Species to look for as the season opens include wood blewits, amethyst deceivers and collared earthstars, which can appear after rain. Fly agaric, with its unmistakable red and white cap, is emerging too. It is highly toxic, so admire it, photograph it and leave it exactly where it stands.

Instead of asking only: what species is this?

Try asking: what is it growing on?

Is it decomposing dead wood? Growing alongside a particular tree? Appearing where the soil remains damp?

Fungi are among the greatest recyclers in the natural world.

Many also form relationships with tree roots, exchanging nutrients and water through vast underground fungal networks.

A woodland walk becomes very different once you start looking for the processes beneath the mushrooms.

What to watch in nature this week



September is a month of movement.

Some summer visitors are leaving Britain. Other birds are arriving for winter.

House martins and swallows continue gathering before migration.

Pink-footed geese begin arriving from their breeding grounds in Iceland, Greenland and Svalbard.

Hedgerows become increasingly important as insects decline and birds switch towards berries and seeds.

Meanwhile:

- Spiders become increasingly visible
- Acorns continue ripening
- Conkers begin falling
- Fungi emerge after rain
- Seeds replace flowers
- Trees begin withdrawing chlorophyll from their leaves

Try spending ten minutes beside one mature hedge.

Stay still.

Watch who arrives.

You may quickly realise that a hedgerow is less a boundary and more a living transport network.

Wild swimming as the season changes



September can be a beautiful month for outdoor swimming.

Water may still retain some summer warmth even as air temperatures begin falling.

This is a good time to start noticing the transition rather than suddenly deciding winter swimming has begun.

Pay attention to:

- Water temperature
- Breathing on entry
- How quickly your hands and feet cool
- How long you stay comfortable
- How long you take to warm afterwards

Enter gradually and swim within your own capability.

Heavy rainfall can also temporarily reduce water quality by washing pollution from land, roads and drainage systems into rivers, lakes and coastal waters.

Check local water quality information where available and take extra care following significant rainfall. Designated bathing waters in England are monitored through to the end of September, and the Environment Agency publishes water-quality information for each of them through its [Swimfo service](#), with pollution-risk forecasts at some sites.

Swimmers can give something back too. The Environment Agency's [BluePrint](#) citizen-science project lets anyone report observations about rivers, lakes and beaches from a phone, turning a regular swim or walk into environmental monitoring.

Try a blue-space pause

Outdoor wellbeing does not have to involve distance, speed or achievement.

After a swim, walk or paddle, try staying beside the water for another ten minutes.

No phone. No podcast. No photographs.

Just observe.

Watch reflections change. Listen to birds. Notice wind movement across the surface. Look for insects around the margins.

Nature connection often develops through familiarity and attention.

Returning regularly to the same place through different seasons can reveal changes that are invisible during occasional visits.

Walk differently this week

Choose somewhere familiar.

A woodland. A canal. A river. A park. A common. A coastal path. A nature reserve. An allotment.

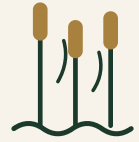
Walk the route more slowly than usual.

Try to identify:

- Something fruiting
- Something dispersing seed
- Something decomposing
- Something migrating
- Something preparing for winter

Seasonal awareness grows surprisingly quickly when we start asking these questions.

From our patch: Doncaster this week



Growing Britain is a national movement with its roots in Doncaster, so each week we will share what is happening on our own patch. Tell us what is happening on yours and we will pass it on.

Potteric Carr Nature Reserve has free entry this weekend, Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September, 9:30am to 4pm, as part of Doncaster Heritage Open Week. No booking needed. There is wetland, woodland and grassland to explore, and the reserve is known for its autumn fungi, so it will only become more interesting after rain.

On Thursday 24 September the reserve hosts a beginners' stargazing evening with Doncaster Astronomical Society. [Details and booking via Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.](#)

For an unstructured walk, Sprotbrough Flash is a fine autumn choice. Follow the Don past the hides, return through the woodland, and look out for spindle, one of the reserve's autumn highlights. The mix of wetland, woodland and limestone grassland makes it an ideal place to watch different habitats respond to the same season.

Conservation inspiration: connection creates recovery



Across Britain, many of the most interesting conservation projects are moving beyond protecting isolated sites.

Restoration increasingly focuses on creating connected landscapes.

Projects include:

- Restoring wetlands
- Reconnecting rivers with floodplains
- Rebuilding hedgerows
- Reintroducing lost species
- Creating wildlife corridors
- Restoring peatlands
- Expanding woodland
- Regenerating coastal habitats
- Creating community growing spaces
- Supporting regenerative agriculture

This change in thinking matters.

Protecting one good place helps.

Connecting many good places creates movement, resilience and opportunity for species to recover.

The same principle applies at community scale.

One wildlife garden matters. A street of wildlife gardens becomes a corridor.

One community orchard matters. A network of allotments, orchards, hedges, gardens and green spaces begins to change the ecology of an entire neighbourhood.

Two stories from this month show the principle working

At RSPB Geltsdale in Cumbria, thirteen hen harrier chicks fledged this season, the most recorded there in a single breeding season since records began more than a century ago. Hen harriers remain among the most intensely persecuted birds of prey in the UK, so the achievement shows both what protection makes possible and how fragile recovery remains. [The RSPB has the full account.](#)

And in East Sussex, Lewes has become the first town in England to formally recognise rights for its trees. On 10 September the town council adopted a Tree Charter declaring that trees have the right to flourish and to complete their natural life cycles. The declaration carries no direct legal force. Its power lies in what it changes about how a place regards the nature it holds. It asks what happens when trees are treated as participants in a town rather than simply assets within it. [More from the Sussex Express.](#)

This week's reading shelf



Hedgelands by Christopher Hart

A fascinating exploration of Britain's hedgerows, their wildlife, history, food, folklore and place in the landscape.

It is particularly appropriate reading for September, when hedges visibly reveal how much ecological work they perform.

Entangled Life by Merlin Sheldrake

A brilliant introduction to fungi and the extraordinary relationships they form with plants and ecosystems.

Autumn is probably the perfect time to read it because fungi suddenly become visible everywhere.

The Garden Jungle by Dave Goulson

An exploration of how gardens can become functioning ecosystems supporting insects, birds and biodiversity while remaining useful spaces for people.

The Book of Wilding by Isabella Tree and Charlie Burrell

A practical exploration of rewilding principles and how they can be applied beyond large estates to smaller spaces including gardens and community land.

From the research world

A new open-access paper in the journal *Ambio* explores how nature-connectedness and wellbeing data could be crowdsourced across community nature projects, so that small local initiatives can collectively build stronger evidence about the social value of nature. That question sits very close to the heart of what Growing Britain is trying to do. [Read the paper.](#)

Listen



Gardening with the RHS

A useful weekly companion for seasonal growing advice, plant science, wildlife gardening and practical horticulture.

Knepp Wildland Podcast

Conversations about rewilding, insects, grazing, ecosystem restoration and the lessons emerging from the Knepp landscape.

Rewilding the World

Explores restoration projects, ecological processes and species recovery across different landscapes. Start with [the recent episode on wildfire](#), in which Frans Schepers discusses how rewilding and large grazing animals can make landscapes more fire-resilient.

Wild Tales (National Trust)

A recent episode on clever corvids explores the intelligence, behaviour and folklore of crows, rooks and jackdaws.

Project of the week: build a small dead hedge



Woody prunings do not have to leave the garden.

A dead hedge turns branches and woody cuttings into habitat.

Create two parallel rows of sturdy stakes roughly a metre apart.

Place branches and woody material between them.

Continue filling the structure as pruning material becomes available.

Over time it can provide shelter for:

- Beetles
- Spiders
- Insects
- Hedgehogs
- Amphibians
- Small mammals

Leaves become trapped inside. Fungi begin decomposing the wood. Insects colonise it. Predators arrive to feed on those insects.

Material that might once have been treated as waste becomes part of a living food web.

That is regenerative gardening in practice.

The RHS has a [guide to dead wood habitats](#) if you want to take it further.

The equinox journal prompt



Around the equinox, find somewhere where you can see both open sky and vegetation.

Look for:

One thing still growing. One thing producing fruit or seed. One thing beginning to die back. One organism feeding on something another organism produced.

Then consider:

Where can I see balance in this landscape, and where can I see exchange?

The equinox is often described as a moment of balance.

Nature itself is rarely static.

Seeds are moving.

Birds are migrating.

Fruit is being eaten.

Leaves are falling.

Fungi are decomposing.

Roots are storing energy.

Soil organisms are recycling.

Perhaps ecological balance is less about everything remaining equal and more about continuous exchange between growth, use, release and renewal.

That may be one of autumn's most valuable lessons.



Grow something.
Notice something.
Share something.

Growing Britain is about strengthening the relationship
between people, food, nature and place.

This week:

Grow something that will survive beyond summer.
Notice one seasonal change you have never consciously
observed before.

Leave something useful for wildlife.
Share something you have grown, learned or discovered.

A resilient landscape is built through thousands of small
relationships.

Growing food.
Growing knowledge.
Growing biodiversity.
Growing Britain.

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