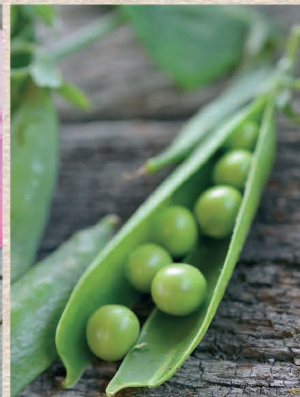


Unique,
entertaining, educational!
–
Disconnect your children
from electronic devices and
connect them with nature!
–
Enjoy the time spent
together!

Anita Blahušová

LIVING GARDEN

GARDENING WITH YOUR CHILDREN



LIVING GARDEN

GARDENING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

This book comprehensibly and in an entertaining manner explains the principles of gardening (not only) with children. It also presents the year-round calendar overview and serves as a handy manual for any type of garden.

It is unique because of its focus on involving both younger and older children in every step of gardening. It offers a lot of inspiration for creative and interesting play in the garden during any season. But the games are linked with real growing that will entertain both adults and children and that allows them to grow their own beautiful harvest! Year-long life cycle of every garden alternates with specific working procedures and activities suitable for children in form of original but easy projects.

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Anita Blahušová

Anita Blahušová is an author of three books on urban gardening. She cooperates with the KOKOZA organization, which promotes composting and gardening in the city, and she was the organizer of a festival dedicated to urban gardening called „Letná roste“. She promotes utilitarian gardens shaped in accordance with natural principles: fragrant, buzzing, colourful and a little wild. she regularly shares her knowledge and experience on her blog www.zahradamebavi.cz.

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CREATE YOUR OWN LIVING GARDEN

We are part of nature, despite our continuous efforts to distance ourselves from it. How much time does a modern person spend outside, in nature and fresh air? We have transformed our surroundings and now they are transforming us too. But there is a simple remedy – just visit the closest garden. Because gardens work as an incredible connecting force between humans and nature.

The garden is undoubtedly an inspiring environment for children. We wish they would spend more time in the garden, so they could understand the natural order and the rhythm of changing seasons and appreciate the little joys around them. A garden is a living organism, subject to constant change, just like our lives and surroundings. Families with toddlers, schoolchildren, and teenagers will all have different requirements for a garden.

What can you do, then, to make a garden more interesting for your children? First, don't be afraid to allow a little life into your garden. This may sound contradictory, but many family gardens are just dead, empty deserts. Yet the first steps can be small and simple: a pile of wood or rocks can be left in a less visible corner of the lawn, or evergreen conifers can be replaced by a handful of fruit trees or bushes.

Garden as a space for playing and exploring

Garden is like a large outdoor fitness centre. There is a wide array of playground equipment available on the market, which children can certainly enjoy. But why not think more deeply about creating more meaningful and natural ways of playing than just climbing inside a plastic tunnel? For example, the increasingly popular willow playhouses are a great addition to any garden – the branches sprout in the spring, and their leaves provide a nice place to play in the shade. Multi-stem low trees or bushes are ideal for climbing and any child will be delighted by a simple swing or a pile of sand. A great toy, often overlooked by parents, is mud. Even flipping over a large stone in the garden can be an adventure: children are often surprised by the amount of life discoverable beneath its surface. During the summer months, let children run in the garden barefoot. More ambitious parents can even build a low-budget reflexology path where little explorers can feel different surface materials with their bare feet. Pinecones, pebbles, sand, tree bark, or wooden blocks can all be used for this purpose. Hide your sophisticated barbecue and teach your children to light a fire on their own, and grill sausages simply on a twig.

Safety first

A garden, where small children play, should first and foremost be safe. On the other hand, children should not be underestimated: with the older ones, the risk can be lowered through explanation, so that they are aware of any potential dangers. Uncovered bodies of water, including ponds and pools, present a problematic garden feature for smaller children. Even a very shallow pond can be dangerous for a toddler as they can drown in as little as 20 centimetres of water if they fall face down and, in shock, inhale water. It is thus advised to surround a potentially dangerous body of water with a fence. Even an artificially created shallow or easier exit from water can be helpful, and potential risk can also be lowered by covering the surface of the water with a net or grille. However, parents' supervision still remains the most effective safety measure.

Chemical pesticides also present a potential risk, and their use should be carefully considered in gardens with children. They should only be used after implementing the proper safety protocol. It goes without saying that such products should be stored away from children, and the same goes for garages and sheds which often contain gardening tools and products dangerous for children.

The presence of poisonous plants in family gardens is a frequently discussed topic. Children, primarily toddlers, tend to taste colourful or otherwise intriguing blossoms and plants. The majority of common garden plants are only mildly toxic, and they would have to be consumed in large quantities to cause a serious reaction. Several exceptions are poisonous even in small amounts – and they have a dedicated chapter in this book.

Little Gardeners

This book is not an exhausting gardening manual. It is enough if it simply becomes an inspiration for how to make your garden a space for wonderful future memories for you and your children.

Try to include your children also in the gardening process itself. It can be challenging to persuade older children to participate, but the younger ones are fascinated with gardening and observing how a plant grows, sprouts, blossoms, and bears fruit. Creating a nice sunlit garden bed where they can plant their own vegetables or flowers can suffice. The chosen plants should have features that are interesting to the children in some way, such as tasty fruit, unique scent, soft leaves, or unusual size. Even a tiny garden in a flowerpot on a window sill can bring children joy.

When you get restless, resist the temptation and do not interfere with the children's gardening activities. It is best to let them experiment on their own.


What plants are most suitable for little beginner gardeners? It is recommended to choose quick-sprouting seeds such as horseradish, garden cress, or sunflower. For the smallest children, larger seeds, like peas, beans, or pumpkins, are easiest to manipulate. There is no need for special equipment, however, you can motivate them with a kid's gardening set. Gardening with children can bring many precious moments, and harvested vegetables and herbs can even be used to cook a simple meal together.

And what if children lose interest in gardening? When you garden with joy, even if children do not actively participate, they will absorb the knowledge either way.

Work and time spent in the garden return you back to the roots in every sense possible. It is somewhat of a miracle: just try planting a seed or seedling, and watch the plant grow.



*Gardening is a passion. Grab a garden hoe
and go outside to get your hands dirty.*



*Garden is
a place where you
can employ all
your senses.*

Taste, touch, listen, smell
sometimes, and observe.

Practical Tips for Beginners

No garden can be maintenance-free, so even yours will require a certain time and effort.

Try gardening small first.

As for vegetables, a smaller patch is ideal, and for flowers, try a front garden. Little gardeners will appreciate an easily accessible patch, ideally in constant view so they can monitor their progress.

Do not spend money unnecessarily.

In the beginning, all you need is some basic but quality equipment: a garden hoe, a spade, a small shovel for planting, garden scissors, and a watering can. After you find out whether you truly enjoy gardening, you can make additional purchases.

Start with smaller goals.

Start with plants that are easier to maintain. Aromatic herbs such as oregano, thyme, and lemon balm, or less demanding vegetables like peas, radishes, and salads are ideal.

Grow plants that require minimum effort but yield great results.

Some examples include rich-blooming Chinese peonies or long-lasting daylilies. Do not forget that small bulbous plants, snowdrops, crocuses, and grape hyacinths all yield wonderful results. Plant seedlings in groups, ideally of three or five, they always look better in larger numbers.

Look for species native to where you live.

And try to plant them in your garden, whether flowers, vegetables, or fruit. Get inspired by your surroundings as well, while going on a walk, look around you and in your neighbours' gardens. Plants that flourish there will likely grow well in your garden too.

Educate yourself and your children together.

Look for information not only about plants but also about soil, climate, weather, insects, and other living organisms.

Create a family gardening journal.

Together, you can write down what species you've planted and where, what you harvested, what was the weather like, and what brought you the most joy while gardening. You can also draw any plants and animals you meet in your garden.

Do not get discouraged by a potential lack of success.

Plants are living organisms and sometimes, despite the largest effort, the gardener's aims are not achieved while other plants are rapidly growing where you even don't want them to.

Respect the cycle of nature and make your garden into a living space, comfortable for both you and other animals.

This book should help you achieve that.

Enjoy browsing
and reading
together with your
children!



GETTING TO KNOW NATURE

Neither in nature nor in our garden are we alone. We are surrounded by a complex ecosystem that functions in natural harmony. It is important to be aware of this fact and to take steps to make our garden friendly not only to us but to all kinds of animals. This does not necessarily mean letting the area around your house become an impenetrable jungle of grass and weeds. Just create a few nooks and crannies in your garden that attract small animals, birds, butterflies, and colourful insects, and the garden will become their home. Only a rich, varied, and a little bit wild garden will also be a living garden, which will stimulate children's natural desire to explore, and where you will experience true wonders together, maybe every day and at any time of the year!

So, let's take a look at the most common animals that share the garden with us (or soon will if we keep inviting them). Once you've seen them, get out and explore the surrounding greenery. Surely you will come across many of them in your area too!

GARDEN INSECTS

Insects undoubtedly belong in our garden. The more of them fly, buzz, and chirp in the garden, the healthier and more beautiful it is. Many insects pay for our ignorance: unfortunately, it then becomes true that what I don't know, I fear, and also destroy. Please remember that even the smallest animal is irreplaceable and important to the nature around us. From the infinite number of insects, let us now introduce those we meet most often in the garden.

Western Honeybee

Bees are indispensable for life in the garden mainly because they pollinate many plant species. Humans have kept bees for their benefit for thousands of years already, yet we cannot say that they have completely domesticated them. Bees live in communities called colonies. Up to several thousand bees gather around a single queen.

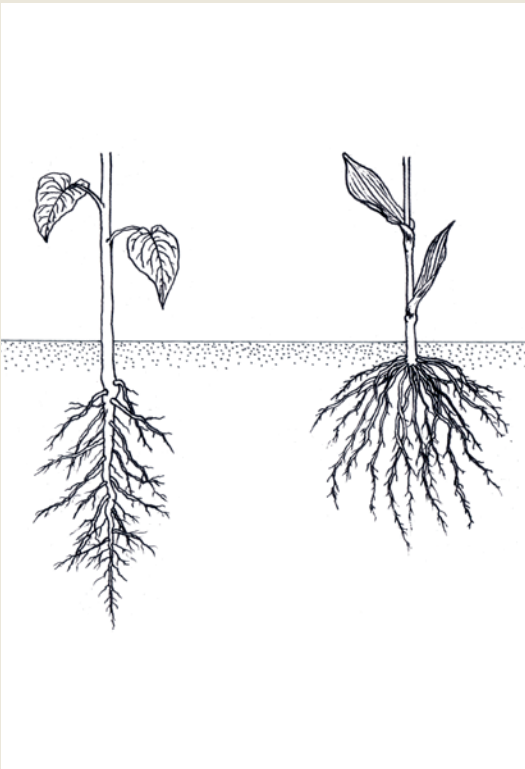


PLANT PARTS

Similarly to the human body, the bodies of plants that we grow in our garden, are also composed of multiple organs. Before we start with actual gardening, let us examine this more closely.

Root

The root secures the plant in the soil, receives moisture, and supplies the plant with nutrients. It can also be a storage organ, for example, in potatoes (tubers) the plant stores nutrients important for wintering: these are then used in the kitchen. Some plants have vertical roots that grow deep into the ground, while others have roots that extend shallowly below the surface. The relationship between the plant and the soil is not one-sided: for example, the roots of some plants (such as peas) harbour bacteria that can receive airborne nitrogen and use it to enrich the soil around them. Almost all plants have their roots covered with what is known as mycelium (tiny threads of fungi), with which they help each other. **This is called symbiosis (mutual aid and balance), an important principle in both soil and nature.**



Stem

Vital substances flow through the stem between the roots and the leaves. If the stem has leaves along its entire length, we call it a stem (the case of nettle), with scape, the leaves can be found only at the bottom (the case of dandelion), and a stem with nodes is called a stalk (in cereals). Herbs have a fleshy stem, while shrubs and trees have a woody stem, which we call a trunk.



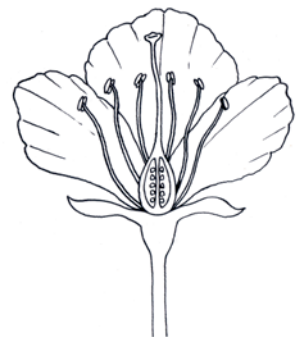
Leaf

These lateral, mostly green plant organs can grow in different positions on the stem and come in various shapes. Leaves are extremely important: they evaporate excess water, and at the same time, carry out a process called **photosynthesis**. What is it? Photosynthesis is a very complex process during which a plant captures the energy in sunlight and creates organic substances, primarily carbohydrates, from carbon dioxide and water. In addition, during the process, oxygen is released which we humans need to survive.



Flower

Flowers are one of the reproductive plant organs. Their role is to produce seeds from which the next generation of plants will grow. In standard flowering plants, we can easily distinguish between the flower axis, petals, male stamens with pollen grains, and the female pistil. It is important that the pollen lands on the pistil and that pollination takes place. Plants therefore try to attract pollinators, most often insects, with their colourful flowers, alluring scent, and nectar. On the other hand, plants that are wind-pollinated (for example, many grasses) do not have to worry about appearance or scent, and so we often do not even notice their flowers.





HOW TO SOW AND PLANT PROPERLY

Once the seedbed is ready, it is time for the plants. There are several options: sowing seeds, using seeds to preplant our own seedlings which we then plant, or buying ready-to-use seedlings. Let us now then look at the basic principles of proper sowing and planting so we can work swiftly.

Sowing Seeds

As a general rule, the seeds are sown about 2-3 times as deeply as their actual size. The smallest ones are then just sprinkled over the surface of the ground and pressed down slightly. Really small seeds, such as grass seeds or chamomile seeds, should be mixed before sowing to improve handling, for example with sand. Seed tapes (pre-spaced seeds on a tape, available in many garden centres) save time.


When digging out the sowing furrow, firm up the seed bed (the soil at the bottom of the furrow is slightly more solid), then cover it with a blanket of loose soil and press it down gently to encourage water to rise to the surface. Then water the bed, preferably with a watering can, so that the newly sown seeds are not washed away by an excessive stream of water. It is good to mark the sown beds so that we know later what plants are growing in the rows.

When the plants have grown in a few weeks, it is time to weed, or to thin out the growth so that it is not too crowded, and each plant has enough space to develop properly.

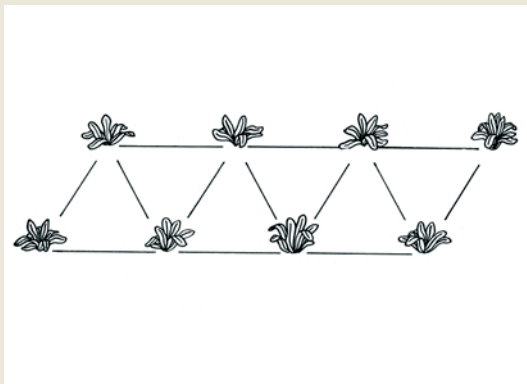
Planting Seedlings

Another option is to plant already-grown plants. Proper planting is not rocket science. When to plant? Certainly not in hot sunny weather. It is best to plant in the morning or evening if possible, or at least when the sky is cloudy. Transplanting is stressful for the plant, and having to cope with sunstroke, would strain it too much.

Mark the rows with a string or a board. If you are planting seedlings purchased in a container that have a very thick root ball, it is good to loosen the root ball, that is, either gently tear it with your hands or cut through it to allow the roots to grow into the loose soil.



*A seed should
lie on a firm
base and be covered
with a soft blanket
of soil.*



The way we arrange the plants in a bed (or in a larger container) is called plant spacing. It refers to the spacing of plants in geometric shapes, which can be squares, rectangles, or triangles but which can also be irregular. Plant spacing equals the distance between rows times the distance of plants from one another. Why use plant spacing? To give each plant enough space to grow properly – logically, the larger the plants, the greater the spacing.

The depth of planting is also very important. A gardening rule of thumb says that the plant should be planted at the same depth as it has been growing so far, and in the same upright position if possible. There are exceptions, of course: tomato seedlings, for example, are best planted slightly tilted and deeper, so that the first leaves are below the ground. The plant will thus develop a richer root system. Similarly, cucumbers, for example, are planted deeper than they originally were. On the contrary, with some other plants, we must be careful not to plant them too deep. This rule applies primarily to plants that have a so-called “crown” (an example is the central part of a strawberry cluster, practically a transition between the roots and the stem, or the point from which the youngest and most fragile leaves grow): this should never be covered with soil. Strawberry or lettuce seedlings should not be planted too deeply, with the crown just above the ground.

We have finished planting and now it's a good time to temporarily shade the plants and water them well. Any fertilizing should wait until they are better rooted.





GARDENING PROJECTS
FOR THE WHOLE YEAR



SPRING

MARCH

Average temperature: 2.5 °C

March sun has short arms but a long coat.

A dry March and a wet May, fill barns and bays with corn and hay.

As it rains in March, so it rains in June.

On St. Gregory's Day, a lazy farmer does not plough.

On St. Joachim's Day, winter has truly gone.

(Czech proverbs)

What to do in the garden in March.

Do a spring cleaning of the beds, removing plant remains, twigs, and leaves. Gently loosen and aerate the beds.

Load the cleaned beds with mature compost and lightly incorporate it into the soil with an iron rake.

Nourish the fruit bushes, such as by mixing in the compost.

Prepare vegetable beds.

Plant out peas, carrots, radishes, lettuces, and rocket, and plant garlic.

At the end of the month, start pre-growing plants from seed at home, such as tomatoes.

Plant new potatoes after St. Joseph's Day (March 19).

Pt the end of the month, plant new fruit bushes and trees, especially peaches or apricots.

Plant roses. For growing roses, make pruning cuts: best when Forsythia (in Czech commonly known as golden rain) is in bloom. Remove old and dead rose shoots, and cut the others to about 30 cm.

Pow some annuals in the bed: such as oriental poppy, marigold, or Love-in-a-Mist.

Propagate perennials that bloom later in summer or autumn (such as yarrows, asters, or sneezeweeds) by diving their clusters.

Put ornamental grasses right above the ground.

Plant hedges.

Prune, transplant, and fertilise wintering balcony plants.

Replant houseplants.

Pang new birdhouses so our feathered friends have enough time to nest in them.

GROW YOUR RADISHES

Radishes, with their slightly pungent taste caused by mustard enzymes, are one of the first vegetables we can grow in the garden. And why limit yourself to the traditionally red taproots? You can also grow multicoloured, purple, white, round, and elongated radishes!



When to start?

Radishes are sown in early spring (roughly around the end of March and the beginning of April), often earlier if temperatures are above freezing, or again in autumn. In summer, radishes do not form taproots but instead bloom flowers. If you can't give up radishes even over the summer, you will need a special variety suitable for this period (for example, Early Scarlet Globe or Sora).



How to Do It?

1. Choose the Right Plant

Small gardeners will be delighted if you choose radishes of different colours and shapes together. A White Hailstone, an elongated White Icicle, an elongated red-white French Breakfast, or a round red Cherry Belle are all suitable.

2. Where Will the Plants Thrive?

Reserve a sunny bed with permeable, nutrient-rich soil, but not freshly fertilized.

3. Working with Seeds

Use a string or a chopping board to mark out the rows (about 10 cm apart). Do not sow the seeds too densely and about 1 cm deep. Then cover with soil and press lightly. For a continuous harvest, sow additional rows after a week or so.

4. Good Neighbours

Radishes can be sown in the same bed with beans and strawberries, but also with carrots or parsley and all kinds of lettuce. However, do not sow them near cucumbers.

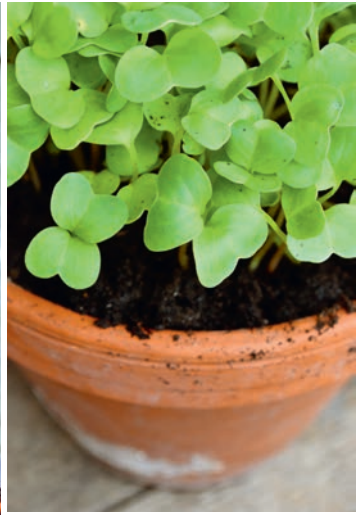
5. How to Take Care of the Plants?

Radishes grow very quickly and are easy to care for. They do not need fertilising and watering is only necessary if the soil is really dry. Weed and hoe the beds regularly. After small plants have emerged, it is advisable to thin out the rows so that the remaining ones have enough space to form sufficiently large taproots.



Supplies

Seeds, string, or board to mark the rows, watering can, and gardening gloves.





SUMMER

JUNE

Average temperature: 15.5 °C

If it rains on the feast of St. Medard, it will rain for forty days.

Saint Antonia has watery eyes.

St. John opens the gates to summer.

A good rain in June sets July in tune.

Rain on St. Barnabas' Day is good for grapes.

(Czech proverbs)

What to do in the garden in June.

Dig out the tulip bulbs from the ground, preferably once every two years. Store the cleaned bulbs until September at around 20 °C.

Remove the dead flowers of ornamental plants: this will encourage further flowering, and the plants will not be exhausted by seed production. If, on the other hand, you want to collect seeds for the next season, leave a few flowers on the plant until the seeds ripen.

Fertilise flowering plants in the beds and pots.

If you have a flower meadow, it is time to mow it for the first time this year.

Mow and water the lawn regularly.

Water the beds, preferably in the evening or in the morning (not at midday and in very hot weather).

Aerate and hoe the soil.

As for woody plants, plant only those that are grown in a container, not open-grown (grown in open soil).

Harvest strawberries regularly. Do not forget to remove any moulding fruit, which will reduce the spread of mildew in the crop. Propagate the strawberry plant via shoots (see the detailed process in the "Growing Strawberries" section).

Harvest other early small fruits (such as currants).

Harvest new potatoes.

Re-seed the beds after the first harvest: sow beans, peas, and beetroot.

Secure vines and provide support for tall plants (such as sunflowers).

Carry house plants outside – they especially benefit from being taken out of the house in containers for some fresh air.

Sow biennials that will bloom next year too (mulleins, common hollyhocks).

Make a bird bath. It can be purchased, but it is sufficient to place a larger, shallow container of water in a quiet place in the garden.

Monitor the plants for diseases and pests.

Weed the beds regularly.

Trim vining tomatoes (bush tomatoes do not require trimming). Keep all varieties of tomatoes tied up, fertilised, and watered.

Trim hedges.

Pick herbs.

CALENDULA OIL

Orange calendula (marigold) blossoms light up any garden. Our grandmothers were already fond of this undemanding herb: calendulas can shed seeds by themselves in the right conditions and reappear without any care the following year. But calendulas are not only beautiful, they are also beneficial. They help with burns, heal children's diaper rash, have a soothing effect on poorly healing wounds, and are an excellent prevention against all kinds of inflammation. One of the easiest ways to use calendula's ability to stimulate healing and reduce inflammation is to make an herbal oil. Its preparation is really simple and takes only a small amount of time.



When to start?

Marigold flowers can be picked and used roughly from June to late autumn.



How to do it

1. Collecting Calendula Heads

As with other herbs, it is best to prepare a wicker basket or a canvas bag for collecting the calendulas; they might become damp in a plastic bag. Select only healthy, freshly opened flowers, all in dry weather. Whole flower clusters should be collected with the green calyx or just the petals. Be careful, the plant is sticky to the touch, so if you don't like your hands to be sticky, use gloves for picking.

2. Preparing Calendula Oil

Choose a jar according to the amount of calendula flowers you have collected. It should be clean, preferably sterilised to be sure. Orange calendula flower heads are best separated into smaller pieces. Then place the flowers in the prepared jar, about three-quarters of its size, and pour the cold-pressed oil over them so that they are completely submerged. All parts of the flowers must be immersed in the oil, as any pieces that stick out usually start to mould and leave the oil to be discarded. To make sure that no flower sticks out, you can use a bottle or jar with a narrow neck where the level is minimal. Close the jar and place it outside the window for about two weeks. It is advisable to occasionally take the jar in your hand and shake it a little, the calendula gradually tints the oil a deep orange. After two weeks, open the jar and strain the finished oil, for example through a sterilised cloth, squeezing out the rest of the oil from the flowers. Pour the liquid into a clean jar and you can start using the oil.



Supplies

For harvesting, prepare a basket or a canvas bag. To make the oil, you will need the collected flowers, a sterilised glass container, a high-quality cold-pressed oil (for example, sunflower, rapeseed, almond, olive), and a wooden spoon for stirring.

3. How to Store the Oil?

Calendula oil in a bottle or jar is best stored in a cool, dry place. After some time, sediment may appear at the bottom of the jar, which is, however, not a sign of spoilage. Homemade oil can help you heal many sores throughout the year.



Fun Facts

Calendula is not only healing, but you can also use it to spice up your diet. The yellowish-orange blossoms have a spicy taste. And why is it called calendula when the flowers are more like a shining sun? Probably because of the shape of the seeds, which resemble the moon. Try collecting them with your children once they are dry. You can save them for next year and sow them again.





AUTUMN

SEPTEMBER

Average temperature: 12.8°C

A warm September is good for fruit and grapes.

When wild geese migrate, it is the end of Indian summer.

September rides a pinto horse.

September blow soft till the fruits in the loft.

On St. Wenceslas Day, get the stove ready.

(Czech proverbs)

What to Do in the Garden in September.

Hoe and plough the beds and fertilise with compost if necessary.

Sow radishes and leaf lettuce or spinach.

Lay the lawn, reseeding where necessary.

Fertilise the existing lawn one last time, such as with compost.

At the beginning of the month, trim the dead lavender stalks.

Plant spring bulbous plants - daffodils, tulips, hyacinths.

Divide and replant perennials.

Harvest plants' seeds for the next season.

Beginning at the end of the month, plant trees and shrubs.

PICK SEEDS FOR THE NEXT YEAR

Collecting seeds is a great way to see how plants produce differently sized and shaped seeds and how much can a small seed grow. The easiest place to start is with the seeds of annuals: they are slow to finish flowering, and they complete their life cycle in a single year. Collect seeds of your favourite species and use them for sowing again in the spring.



When to start?

Once plants finish flowering and seeds mature, most often from the end of summer until the beginning of October.



How to do it?

1. Choose the right plants

You can also buy your own seed for perennials or vegetables, but for beginners, it's best to start with your favourite annuals. A safe option is to collect seeds from all types of tagetes; love-in-a-mist, calendula, common morning glory, rose moss, garden cosmos, scarlet runner bean, and nasturtium are all excellent.

2. When and where to collect

Dry, sunny weather is best for seed collection. Choose healthy, strong plants with well-ripened, dry seeds. These should be easy to pick or extract from the pods.

3. Storage

If the seeds do not seem dry enough, spread them out on absorbent kitchen paper and leave them to dry for a few days. Put the dry seeds in paper bags - you and your children can even put them together and design their packaging! Be sure to label them with the name of the plant and write down the habitat where you collected the plant and the date of collection (you will quickly forget the details over the winter and the information will come in handy in spring). Seal the bags in an airtight container and place them in a cool, dry place if possible.



Supplies

Bowls for collecting seeds, small paper bags, and resealable glass jars for storing.

Garden riddle

Do you know what extracting the inner seed from the seed coat is called? Winnowing! Winnowed seeds are a small miracle with which we can look forward to spring.





WINTER

DECEMBER

Average temperature: -1.0 °C

A visible Milky Way in December means a full harvest in the next year.

St. Lucy shortens the night but does not lengthen the day.

Freezing Christmas is better than rainy ones.

A green Christmas, a white Easter.

Light Christmas, light wheatsheaf; Dark Christmas, heavy wheatsheaf.

(Czech proverbs)

What to Do in the Garden in December.

Monitor winterised plants.

Water outside plants in containers and protect them against frost.

Pruno cherry tree branches, to shorten the wait for the Christmas season.
(Czech tradition)

Pile snow on the beds: it protects the plants and provides them with the necessary moisture.

Hang a bird feeder outside and add more feed if necessary.

Figure and sketch out the shape of the garden for the next season.

Put together a list of favourite plants.

WHAT TO FEED BIRDS

Feeding birds in winter is a popular activity in our region. In times when food is scarce, we like to help them, but we must be careful not to harm the birds by winter overfeeding. A great benefit is an opportunity to get to know common and rarer bird species: there will certainly be great and blue tits, house sparrows, and common blackbirds at the feeder. With a bit of luck, a European greenfinch or other species of titmice might arrive, and in the time of extreme cold and food scarcity, a wood nuthatch, a common bullfinch, or a colourful European goldfinch may also show up.

Making a Birdhouse.

There are many ways to feed and thus attract our bird neighbours. The most common are classic, self-feeding with a tray and fat ball feeders. When making a bird feeder, it is best to use natural materials, such as wood, but plastics can also be used. Think about the size: a large enough bird feeder will allow larger birds (like blackbirds) to visit, while an overly large one will attract, for example, doves, which may then drive other birds away from the food. The food in the feeder should not be easily blown away by the wind or spoiled by rain or snow, so a small roof and slightly raised edges are important. It is easy to make a fat ball feeder: you can use suet balls in a plastic net, or a clay pot covered with fat with seeds and crushed nuts; you can also dip a large pine cone into the heated mixture.

What to Put in the Bird Feeder.

We have the feeder, we have placed it correctly, so now what should we put in it? In general, old and spoiled food is not suitable, and we should not feed the birds anything salty, or spiced, no pasta, fresh bread or sausages! On the contrary, **various seeds, oatmeal, nuts, or berries are all good.**

Different bird species prefer different foods: titmice of all kinds like oily seeds and suet mixtures, apples or berries from ornamental shrubs attract blackbirds or fieldfares, and seeds and fruit stones are appreciated by hawfinches. The brightly coloured great spotted woodpecker would appreciate a hanging suet ball.

If you position the feeder so that you can see it every day, for example at breakfast, it will bring you great pleasure to observe it during the winter months.



Be careful not to hang the fat feeders in direct sunlight, as this can melt the fat.

It is generally advisable to place the feeder at least one and a half meters above the ground and also at least two meters from the nearest tree.

If you are attaching it to a branch, then it is best to hang the feeder on a wire or string: this will help to not attract a hungry cat. On balconies and terraces, place feeders on railings rather than directly against the window so it is safer and more accessible to birds. Bird feeders should also be emptied and cleaned occasionally to avoid any possible spread of infections among birds.