

Gardening

Fionnuala Fallon



Weeds and seeds, and new beginnings in the garden

For various reasons – some avoidable, some not – I neglected my kitchen garden this year. So I sowed seed too late, or not at all, or I forgot to protect the emerging seedlings from slug damage or to transplant them in good time. To compound these failings, I weeded and hoed less than I should have, with the result that any plants that stoically survived sporadically disappeared under fast-growing carpets of groundsel, shepherd's purse, nettles and chickweed that appeared almost overnight.

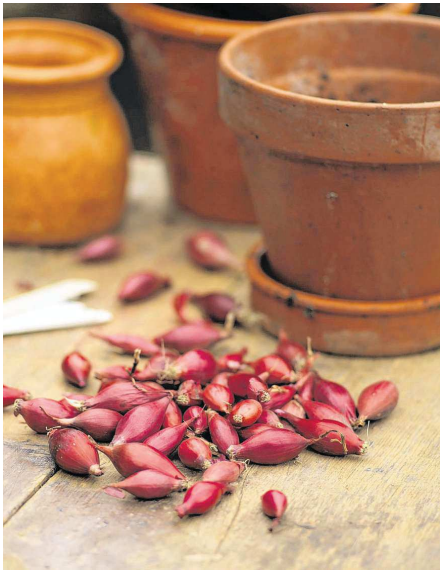
For that reason, this week's column is a mea culpa, mea maxima culpa of sorts, but it's also a celebration of the fact that autumn's arrival allows us to put a growing year's failings behind us, safe in the knowledge that tomorrow is another day. So if this was the summer that your potatoes succumbed to blight, your lettuce bolted and your cabbage plants were reduced to skeletal remains by caterpillars, just chalk it up to experience, because the great thing about autumn in the garden is that not only is it a time for endings, but for new beginnings.

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Don't use weedkiller. Hoe them, pull them, flame them or, if you're dealing with an area where weeds have completely run riot, chop or strim them back

Let's start with those weeds. Don't, whatever you do, use weed-killer. Instead, hoe them, pull them, flame them or, if you're dealing with an area where weeds have completely run riot, chop or strim them back (remove and bag any seedheads first) before mulching the area with manure and then covering it with black plastic sheeting. By this I mean the strong, thick, polythene sheeting that farmers use to bale silage and which you can buy in rolls from good hardware shops, rather than flimsy refuse bags.

To prevent it working its way loose in a winter gale, pull it taut and then shallowly bury the edges. Left on the ground until next spring, it will do a great job of killing off most weeds, leaving behind only the most stubborn perennial kinds. Even these will be so weakened that you should



■ Sow easy: red onion sets ready to be planted; freshly harvested broad beans; winter-hardy 'Meteor' pea seed about to be sown. PHOTOGRAPHS: RICHARD JOHNSTON

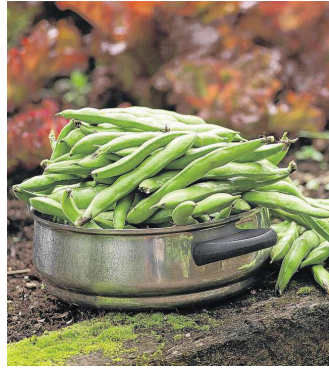
be able to dig them out with relative ease.

Effective weed-control aside, let's talk about those empty vegetable beds. The good news is that there are a variety of tasty food crops that can be sown or planted in October and early November to harvest next year. Onions, for example, including the ultra-hardy varieties Radar and Troy, and shallots, their milder-flavoured cousins, recommended varieties of which include Jermor and Griselle.

Another is garlic, which needs a lengthy growing period and low temperatures in order to crop well. Varieties suitable for autumn planting include Valledado, Red Duke, Lautrec Wight, Cristo, Thermidrome', Marco and Solent Wight.

All these bulbous plants are members of the onion family and need a fertile, free-draining, weed-free soil in full sun. A sunny raised bed recently cleared of its summer crops, for example, is ideal. Just make sure to replace lost nutrients with the addition of some homemade compost and a sprinkling of dried seaweed powder. Some gardeners also add a little slow-release organic granular fertiliser, ideally rich in phosphorus, to encourage good bulb formation.

In the case of onions and shallots, plant these as young, disease-free sets to a depth where the tips are barely below the ground. For garlic, break up the bulbs into individual cloves, discarding any that are



pitted or mouldy, before planting them just deep enough that the tips are covered with a 3cm-thick layer of soil.

Broad beans are yet another tasty food crop that will grow well in milder gardens from seed sown this month. Either sow directly into the ground or into root-trainers (my preferred method) for transplanting once the young seedlings have developed a strong root system. Recommended varieties include the ultra-hardy Super Aquadule.

Early cropping varieties of peas will also do well from an autumn sowing, including Douce Provence, Meteor, Feltham First and Kebedon Wonder. Just like broad beans, I prefer to sow these into root-train-

ers to transplant once established. Either way, take precautions against slugs as well as mice, as the latter will steal the tasty seed.

In mild gardens, it is also worth quickly sowing some of the hardier winter lettuce varieties such as Winter Gem, as well as lamb's lettuce, spinach and oriental leaves. If sowing seed directly outdoors, a cloche or loose cover of garden fleece secured in the same way as the black plastic sheeting will help greatly with germination and growth. Again, take precautions against slug damage.

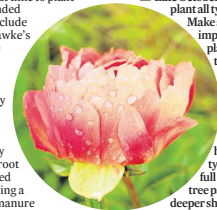
Finally, these vegetables aside, late autumn is also a great time to plant rhubarb, recommended varieties of which include Timperley Early, Hawke's Champagne and the autumn-cropping Livingstone. This large long-lived perennial likes a very fertile, well-drained but moisture-retentive soil in a sunny, weed-free spot, away from the shade and root systems of established trees or shrubs. Adding a few bucketloads of manure and/or garden compost to the soil before planting will make it extra happy. And happy plants, as we all know, make for happy gardeners.



This week in the garden

■ Summer-flowering containers are well past their best, so remove any spent annuals and put them on the compost heap. For a cheerful spring display, replace the top 25cm of soil or compost and fill the space with some spring-flowering bedding plants underplanted with spring bulbs. Wallflowers, for example, will give a splash of colour and add the important element of scent, while forget-me-nots mingle well with almost every shade of narcissus and tulip.

■ Late October is an excellent time to plant all types of paeonies (left). Make sure to give these impressively long-lived plants a deep, rich, moisture-retentive but free draining soil, enriched with manure, a little seaweed powder and a handful of slow-release organic granular fertiliser. Both the ltoth hybrids and herbaceous types like a spot in either full sun or light shade, while tree paeonies will tolerate deeper shade. Recommended herbaceous varieties include Buckeye Belle, Florence Nichols and Immaculate; excellent ltoth varieties include Cora Louise. Available from good garden centres and to order from specialist Irish suppliers leamorenursery.com



A botanical artist with a poetic aesthetic

Dig in: The unusual, collectible work of Rachel Dein captures perfect moments in the garden

Have you ever wanted to preserve a gardening moment in time? To capture, for example, the sculptural qualities of autumnal seed-heads before they fade and fall, or the fond memories associated with a handpicked bouquet?

The British botanical artist Rachel Dein does exactly this, albeit in a very unusual way, foregoing the more traditional mediums of photography, drawing and painting for handmade plaster or concrete plaques onto which she imprints or casts the delicate, complex forms of many different flowers, foliage

and seedheads. The resulting pieces are exquisite, not just in the way that they succeed in capturing the rich botanical detail of each fragile stem, leaf, bloom and swollen seedhead, but also as art works that reflect the tactile beauty of the plant world.

In one of her plaques, for example, Dein has used the globe-shaped flowers and seed-heads of ornamental alliums, in another, the autumn flowers of Japanese anemones. In other pieces, she has used dicentra, ferns, Welsh poppies, lilac, willow, aquilegia, fritillarias, lavender, marigolds, daisies, Solomons's seal, sweet pea, honesty, nasturtiums, bluebells, hellebores, cosmos, achillea, huchera, clematis, snowdrops, sage and kniphofia, as well as dandelions, pea pods, radishes and carrots.

Botanical fossils
 In some ways, the resulting work calls to mind the dried, pressed specimens of bot-



anic gardens' herbariums where plant parts are preserved for future scientific study. It's also reminiscent of botanical

■ 'Fossils from everyday life'. Detail of 'Clematis macropetalal' by Rachel Dein. PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW MONTGOMERY

fossils, and indeed Dein has referred to her work as "fossils from everyday life".

Equally, its pared-back, poetic aesthetic calls to mind the work of earlier botanical artists, from Dürer and Basilius Besler to the German photographer Karl Blossfeldt. But it is also innately modern, bringing to mind the pictorial meadows and perennial-rich plantings that feature in the work of many of the world's best-known contemporary garden designers.

Dein's work is increasingly in demand: this summer, she exhibited at both the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and at the RHS Hampton Court show, where she held her first solo exhibition. She has also been commissioned to create a series of art works using material from the famous kitchen gardens of Belmont Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons in Oxfordshire, run by chef patron Raymond Blanc. Her work features in the new book, *In Bloom: Creating and Living with Flowers*, by the New York-based photographer Ngoc Minh Ngo.

Bewilderingly, she's not (yet) represented by a gallery, so to buy one of Dein's large plaster pieces, or any of the smaller, more affordable pieces, visit the artist's online Etsy shop or email her to discuss one-off commissions. See racheldein.com and @racheldein

■ Autumn is a good time to plant onions, shallots, garlic and rhubarb, and to sow seeds of broad beans and peas (see left). Good garden centres carry suitable varieties, while recommended online suppliers include greenvegableseds.com, brownenvelopeseeds.com, fruithillfarm.com and organiccatalogue.com

Dates for your diary

■ Continuing at the Cornet Gallery, 3 Great Denmark Street, Dublin 1: 'Come with Me, I'll Show you Something Beautiful', an exhibition by the botanical artist Yanny Peters, celebrating the beauty of her late mother's Wicklow garden and their shared love of nature. See olivierncornetgallery.com

■ Saturday October 22nd, (11am-5.30pm), Burma Fundraiser, tours and lectures at the world-famous Mount Stewart gardens in Co Down. Speakers include Neil Porteous, head gardener of Mount Stewart and Seamus O'Brien, head gardener of Kilmacurragh, €40. Tel. 028-42788387

■ Saturday October 22nd, (10.30-4pm) Autumn garden course at Fruitlawn Gardens, Abbeyfeich, Co Louth. For bookings, see earthshackleton.com, email carolbooth@gmail.com; tel. 057-8730146



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