

# Autumnal harvest time



Our gardening column answering common gardening conundrums by Lynn O'Keeffe focuses on the autumn fruit harvest

**A**utumn is the time of harvests, the hay is saved, the silage cut, the potatoes dug, and the apples are falling ripe from the tree.

It is a time of plenty in the Irish garden and farm. A time for filling of the stores, freezers and sheds before winter.

It's time to plan the garden. You can assess what worked and what didn't, and consider new projects, plant plenty of spring flower bulbs, and order bare root shrubs and trees for winter delivery.

If you had a go during lock down growing some vegetables in the back garden, now is the time to think about adding some fruit.

There's a range of fruit that can be grown easily in the Irish climate, and if you read the country of origin labels in the supermarket on fruit, you'll see very little is Irish. So why not grow some yourself? You don't need a massive amount of space to grow a 6 month supply of eating and cooking apples for a family, and raspberries and blackcurrants are an easy win too.

Pears and plums are great but not guaranteed to crop every year as frost can hit the blossoms, but on average 2 out of 3 years you can have your own juicy tasty plums and pears.

So where to start? Well in the sunniest part of the garden you can find. Fruit trees are beautiful, you've spring blossom, the fruit itself and the autumn colour, so you could have them in beds and borders or as specimen trees, they don't have to be hidden down the back or behind the garage! Consider planting an apple tree in the front lawn, a plum providing shade beside the patio, a pear trained against a sunny garden wall.

The blossoms are great for pollinators, buzzing with bees in spring, and any unpicked fruit will feed hungry birds too. If you want to grow berries for birds in your garden what better plants than fruit bushes? We have bred them to produce lots of berries per square meter after all!

Regarding apple trees, the thing to understand is that they come in various sizes, so you can buy a Bramley tree that'll be 2m tall, or you can buy a Bramley tree your grandchildren will build a tree house in.

What makes the difference is the rootstock the apple is grafted onto. Spend a bit of time looking into rootstocks and order the size that suits your garden. The dwarf trees need TLC= staking, watering and feeding, but will fit in a small space. Medium sized rootstocks need some help in the beginning, but mind themselves after a few years and can grow to 3m, so a step ladder is helpful. Bigger rootstocks make for big trees, but you can mow the lawn underneath, you don't need to stake, water or feed, and after several years you'll get huge crops. But if you want to prune, you'll need a ladder.

Once you've decided on the rootstock, their planting distance will determine how many trees you can fit in. Then you choose varieties, and choose ones you like the flavour of!

The Irish Seed Savers in Co. Clare run apple-tasting days every autumn, or you can check out the varieties written on supermarket apples you like (assuming you buy Irish!) and get those. You may have to order online or through your garden centre for specific varieties on specific rootstocks, but it's a long term project and you are only



A lovely autumn raspberry, great for us to eat, or for the birds to enjoy!

planting a few, so it's important to get it right.

There are over 100 heritage Irish apples and another dozen or so modern varieties suitable for growing in Ireland. My personal recommendations are:

**Katy, Katja**- modern small very red tasty early eating apple

**Kerry Pippin**- Heritage Irish heavy cropper of small tasty apples in early September.

**Irish Peach**- Heritage Irish, delicious apple, the peach is referring to the colour not the flavour.

**Jonagold & Jonagored**- modern heavy cropper of high quality eating apples that'll store well

**Suntan**- Like Cox's Pippin, but will crop in Ireland, ornamental blossom, stores well

**Bramley**- the ultimate cooking apple

Or try a russet, an apple with a hint of pear. Delicious.

Pears- the most common variety is Conference, and with Plums there are two standards- Opal and Victoria, although I do love a Mirabelle plum myself!

Raspberries are another fruit that are worth including in the garden. There are two types- summer and autumn. The autumn ones are the easiest to grow. They don't need staking or netting, and in winter you just prune them all down the ground, weed and mulch, and off you go again.

Plant raspberries well away from everything else, as they spread, in fact they spread so well, a friend with raspberries will usually have plenty of free plants you can

dig up and take away with you! Autumn raspberries crop from the end of August through to Halloween so are a great choice for school gardens.

Currants and Gooseberries are medium sized shrubs, 2 or 3 shrubs of each would be plenty. The birds love them, so if you would like to eat some too, you'll have to cover some of the plants - I don't like the plastic netting as birds get caught in it, so rigid cages over the top, or crop cover works better.

## TOP TIPS

When planting fruit, take your time and choose the right rootstock, and the right variety for you.

Plants turn sunshine into sugars, so the sunnier the spot the sweeter the fruit!

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**For gardeners interested in becoming more wildlife friendly, why not check out [pollinators.ie](http://pollinators.ie) or go to [laois.ie/gardening-for-biodiversity](http://laois.ie/gardening-for-biodiversity) for your free booklet.**



Katy Apple produces heavy crops of bright red fruit



Apple blossom is beautiful to look at and great for pollinators - the production of fruit depends by bees and other insects carrying pollen from tree to tree