

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for November

By Cynthia Brian

"The small but intense pleasure of walking through dry leaves and kicking them up as you go ... they rustle, they brustle, they crackle."
 – Vita Sackville-West, "Walking through Leaves"



Falling leaves amongst the pansies Photos Cynthia Brian

From the last rays of the autumn sun to the glowing embers of winter fires, November is a month of changing colors and softening light creating feasts for our eyes (and our Thanksgiving stomachs) while adding a warm glow to our hearts. The countryside is bathed with leaves turning gold, crimson, russet and orange. The harvest features a bounty of pumpkins, gourds and nuts. The crackle of the fallen leaves underfoot, the balmy days, chilly evenings and misty nights signal the



A view from the Tower of Sissinghurst gardens and across the Wealden countryside. sensational spectacle of autumn. It is time to put our gardens to bed.

For the past few weeks I have had the pleasure of visiting a selection of the great chateaus, castles, palaces and gardens in France and England. Crossed off my bucket list was the romantic landscape of Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent designed by author Vita Sackville-West. It was interesting to note how many of the 22,000 annuals, perennials, and herbs grown in her garden have established themselves nicely here in California.

It is time to plant your bulbs, especially tulips. Having lived in Holland for 18 months, I truly understand and value the humble tulip. Found in the wilds of central Asia, the first tulip bulbs were planted at Holland's Hortus Botanicus Leiden in 1593. Tulips were so highly sought after that Dutch growers around Haarlem devoted every minute to hybridization and cultivation re-



Heucheras offer foliage in a variety of autumn colors, textures and shapes.

sulting in one tulip bulb being so valuable that it could buy an Amsterdam house on the canal or 25 acres of prime farmland. Besides cheese, gin and herring, tulips reigned as kings of exportation. Tulipmania speculation collapsed in 1637, but not before these gorgeous flowers called Rembrandt tulips were depicted on Delft tiles, old master paintings and historic tapestries. If only a grower at the time had a crystal ball.

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