BALCONY FOOD FACTORY

~~ Turn Your Balcony Into A Productive Food Garden By Maximizing Time, Space & Soil ~~

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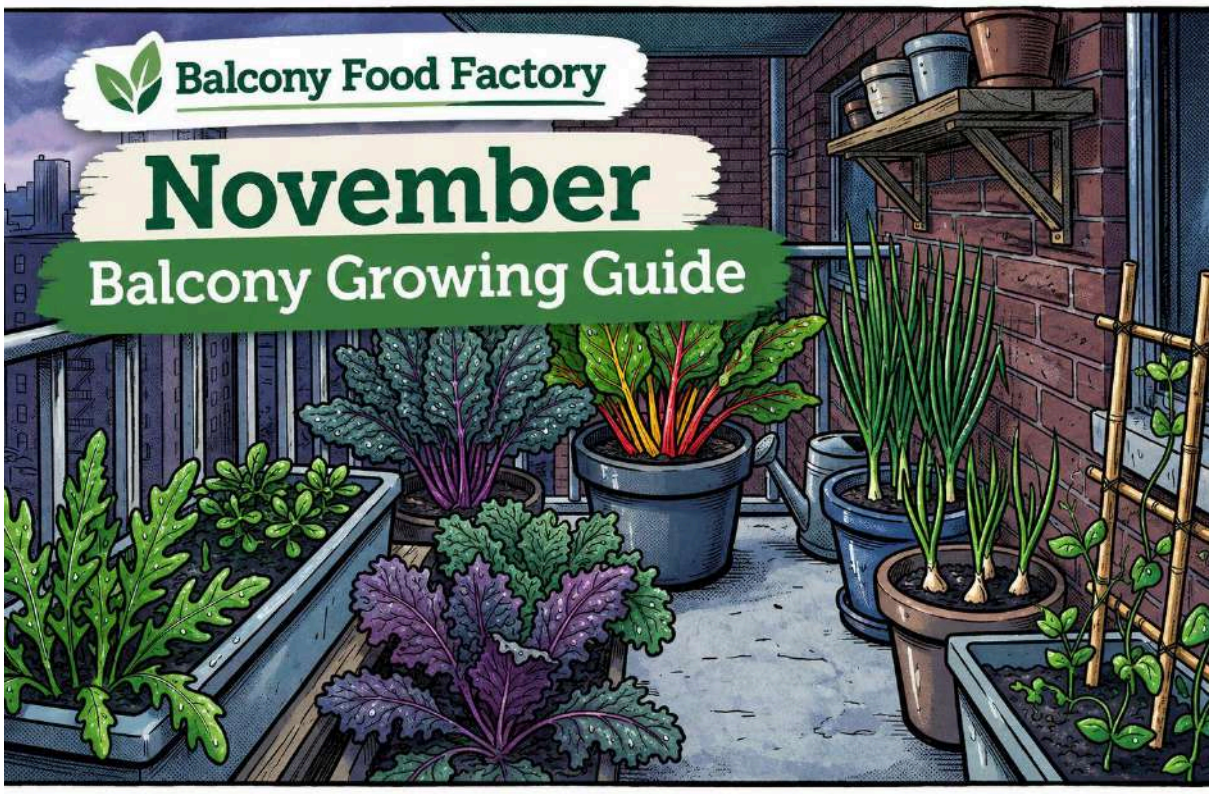
November Balcony Growing Guide



by JIM BOERE

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Keep Harvesting, Protect Your Crops, and Prepare for Winter.

This guide follows the October Balcony Growing Guide: a practical monthly reference you can use on your balcony. It focuses on what is realistic in November, what you can continue harvesting, and how to keep your containers ready for winter and the next growing season.

Winterizing your balcony does not necessarily mean emptying it.

Established crops can still provide harvests in November, even when growth slows.

On my own tenth-floor balcony, I was still growing rocket (arugula), winter purslane, green onions, Swiss chard, endive, garlic, and purple kale on November 17.

Your results will depend on your crops, their stage of growth, your balcony's exposure, and the weather. My point is simply: there is no need to assume the growing season is over just because the calendar says November.

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1. November At A Glance

Sow

November for most of us is not a reliable month for starting new crops outdoors. In most cases, established plants are a safer bet than fresh sowings.

Plant

Garlic can continue establishing roots if planted in suitable conditions. Make sure the container drains well and does not remain waterlogged.

I would make sure to get cloves in the ground before mid-November.

Harvest

Check established kale, rocket, winter purslane, spinach, Asian greens, green onions, parsley, and other crops that are still producing.

Swiss chard and endive may also continue where already established.

Maintain

Pay attention to drainage, excess rain, wind exposure, frost forecasts, and the condition of your plants. Water less often as growth slows, but do not let containers dry out completely.

Plan

Identify which containers can keep producing through winter, which need attention, and which are better prepared for spring.

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2. If You Only Do Five Things This Month

November does not need to become a long list of gardening jobs. Focus on these five priorities.

1. **Harvest what is ready**. Check your established winter crops regularly, even if they appear to be growing very slowly.
2. **Check drainage**. Clear blocked drainage holes and make sure water can escape freely after prolonged rain.
3. **Protect vulnerable containers**. Move pots to a more sheltered position if practical, and prepare suitable protection for severe weather.
4. **Remove unhealthy plant material**. Clear away rotting leaves, diseased growth, and finished crops, but leave healthy plants that can keep producing.
5. **Decide what happens next**. Some containers can continue producing, some may need a little maintenance, and others can wait until spring. Make that decision deliberately rather than clearing everything automatically.

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3. Your Balcony In November

Start by looking at what is actually growing. You do not need to follow the same plan for every container.

Still Productive

Healthy, established winter crops may continue to provide harvests. Look for kale, rocket, winter purslane, spinach, Asian greens, green onions, parsley, and other crops that are still in good condition.

Your action: keep harvesting selectively and monitor the plants. Slower growth is normal as daylight decreases.

Needs Protection

Containers exposed to strong winds, prolonged rain, or severe frost may need attention. Plants in small pots can be more vulnerable to temperature fluctuations than plants growing in the ground.

Your action: check the weather forecast, drainage, and shelter available around your balcony.

Ready For A Decision

A finished summer crop may have left an empty container. The window for sowing something else in it has now pretty much closed.

Your action: remove unhealthy material, assess the potting mix, and prepare the container for spring.

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4. What You Can Still Sow In November

This is the time of year when it pays to be realistic. Short days, low light, and falling temperatures limit how quickly seedlings can develop. A crop that germinates successfully may still make very little progress before winter.

For that reason, November is generally more about maintaining existing crops than starting a new round of production.

Crop or Group	November Approach	What To Expect
Mizuna, tatsoi, and pak choi	Consider sowing only if your conditions are mild and sheltered, and you are prepared for slow development	Germination and growth may be slow; a harvest is not guaranteed, treat as experiment, better chance in cold frame or under fleece cover
Rocket, spinach, and winter lettuce	Prioritize established plants rather than relying on late sowings	Existing plants may provide harvests, but regrowth will be slow
Green onions	Continue growing and harvesting established plants	Useful for gradual, small harvests
Garlic	Plant cloves if you have not already done so and local conditions are suitable	The main job now is root establishment, not above-ground growth

These are cautious options, not a promise that every crop will perform well in every location. On an exposed balcony, late sowings are less dependable than on a sheltered one.

A useful rule for November: Do not sow simply because a pot is empty. First ask whether the crop has a reasonable chance of establishing in the remaining conditions. This late in the year, it probably hasn't.

If you do try a late sowing, treat it as an experiment rather than a crop you are counting on for winter meals. A cold frame or fleece could increase your chances of getting a harvest, which otherwise are quite small.

We have to be realistic in November.

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5. What You Can Harvest In November

Your harvest list depends on what you planted earlier in the year. November is not the time to expect every crop to appear from scratch, but established plants can still earn their place on the balcony.

Crop	Harvest Guidance	Important Note
Kale	Pick suitable outer leaves as needed	A well-established plant can continue producing in cool weather
Rocket	Harvest leaves selectively	Existing plants may continue producing, although regrowth slows

Winter purslane	Pick healthy leaves from established plants	A useful winter salad crop where already growing
Mizuna and tatsoi	Harvest outer leaves or take a whole plant when appropriate	Avoid removing so much that a plant you want to keep cannot recover
Spinach	Harvest healthy leaves gradually	Growth may be slow in low light
Green onions	Pull individual plants or harvest according to how you grow them	Established plants can extend the harvest season
Parsley and chives	Take modest harvests from healthy plants	Growth may slow considerably; avoid stripping plants
Chard and endive	Harvest from established, healthy plants when ready	These are possible crops, not a guarantee for every balcony

My own balcony provides an example of what is possible. On November 17, I still had rocket, winter peas, green onions, winter purslane, Swiss chard, endive, garlic, onions, and purple kale growing on the tenth floor.

However. That is an observation from one balcony and one season, not a guarantee that all these crops are dependable November choices for everyone. The plants were already established, not new November sowings, and the weather (mild) made a difference.

For balcony food gardeners, the practical lesson is to **plan for reliable established crops** first, then treat additional late-season successes as a bonus.

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6. Keep Harvesting, Even When Growth Slows

It is tempting to stop checking your containers once the days become cold and gloomy. But a slower garden is not necessarily an unproductive one.

A few leaves of kale, a small handful of rocket, or some green onions can still be worthwhile. You do not need every harvest to fill a large bowl to make a container valuable.

> If I can still regularly walk onto my balcony and grab something I can use in my cooking, that's the mission accomplished in my book.

Use these habits to keep winter harvesting manageable:

- **Harvest selectively**. Take what you need rather than stripping a plant.
- **Check regularly, not constantly**. A quick inspection every few days is often enough to spot harvestable leaves or developing problems.
- **Leave healthy growth alone**. Do not remove a productive plant simply because it looks less vigorous than it did in summer.
- **Watch for damage**. Remove rotting leaves and damaged material before problems spread.
- **Adjust your expectations**. A plant may take much longer to replace harvested leaves now than it did in June.

Winter productivity is about continuity, not maximum growth.

A few useful harvests over several weeks are better than expecting summer performance from plants growing through the darkest part of the year.

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7. Winterizing Does Not Mean Emptying Your Balcony

One of the most practical lessons from my own balcony is that winter preparation and continued production can happen at the same time.

On November 17, my balcony still held a surprising range of crops. I even had a volunteer potato plant growing from an early variety tuber I had apparently missed during the summer harvest.

I let it grow just for fun and to see if it would produce anything. Why not? I knew the first hard frost would likely kill the plant, but it illustrates something worth remembering: a container garden can still surprise you late in the year.

I ended up harvesting one tiny little potato somewhere in December, so no: it didn't really produce.

The November Balcony Principle

Keep healthy, productive plants in place. Remove what is finished or unhealthy. Protect what needs protection. Prepare empty containers according to their next purpose.

You do not need to choose between a tidy balcony and a productive one.

A winter-ready balcony can still contain growing crops. The aim is not to preserve every plant at all costs, but to make sensible choices about what is worth keeping.

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8. Protect Containers, Plants, and Potting Mix

Winter protection is less about wrapping everything up and more about responding to the conditions your balcony actually faces.

Check Drainage First

In winter, containers can remain wet for long periods because plants use less water and evaporation slows. Roots need oxygen as well as moisture, so persistently waterlogged potting mix can cause problems.

- Check that drainage holes are clear.
- Make sure containers are not sitting in standing water. Now would be a good time to remove saucers.
- Raise pots slightly on suitable pot feet if water cannot escape freely beneath them.
- Avoid compacting the potting mix unnecessarily.

Do not assume every plant needs watering because the surface looks dry. Check the potting mix before watering, and remember that a container can be wet lower down even when the top looks dry. What matters is the moisture situation at root level.

Prepare For Wind and Frost

An elevated balcony may be more exposed than a garden at ground level. Strong winds can dry plants, damage foliage, and topple containers.

- Move vulnerable pots closer to a sheltered wall if doing so is safe and practical.
- Secure containers so they cannot tip or fall.

- Use suitable fleece or temporary covers when severe frost is forecast and the crop benefits from protection.
- Make sure covers are secured against wind and do not crush plants.
- Check covered plants periodically, particularly during mild spells.

Protection can help, but it cannot make every crop winter-proof. Choose crops suited to your conditions, and be prepared for losses during severe weather.

Protect The Containers Themselves

Small containers can experience larger temperature swings than soil in the ground. Some pots, especially certain terracotta or ceramic pots, may be vulnerable to cracking in freezing conditions.

Where appropriate:

- Keep vulnerable pots sheltered from the worst weather.
- Use suitable insulation around containers if needed.
- Avoid materials that block drainage.
- Check that any insulation or wrapping remains secure in strong winds.

You do not need to wrap every pot automatically. Focus on vulnerable containers, exposed positions, and plants that are worth protecting.

Adjust Watering And Feeding

November is not the time to follow a summer watering and feeding routine unchanged.

- Water only when the potting mix and plant need it.
- Avoid leaving containers saturated after rainfall.
- Reduce feeding when growth has slowed or stopped.
- Continue normal care for plants that are actively growing, but do not force growth with extra fertilizer. November is not the time for that.

The goal is healthy plants and sound roots, not unrealistic rapid winter growth.

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9. What To Do With Finished Containers

When a summer crop has finished, decide what to do with the container rather than automatically clearing it or planting something new.

Remove Finished Or Unhealthy Growth

Take out dead plants and remove diseased or rotting foliage. Healthy plants that can keep producing should remain. If a plant has been affected by disease, avoid putting suspect material into a home compost system unless you know your composting method can deal with it safely.

Assess The Potting Mix

If the container is healthy and the mix is in reasonable condition, you may be able to leave it in place until spring. For containers that will be replanted soon, refresh the mix according to the next crop’s needs.

Avoid adding fertilizer, but compost is real nice if you have it.

Choose The Next Step

Plant now only if you have a suitable crop and reasonable conditions for establishing it. Otherwise, protect the potting mix from unnecessary deterioration and plan the next planting for a more suitable time.

Should You Add Compost Or Manure?

Not every container needs a winter top-up. If a pot will remain occupied by a healthy crop, avoid disturbing its roots unnecessarily. If a container is finished, you can assess whether it needs fresh organic matter before its next planting.

Use mature compost or a suitable product according to its intended use and the needs of the next crop, not of the current crop.

Do not assume that more nutrients are always better, especially when winter growth is slow.

If you are going to add manure to your soil now; add only to containers that are empty and done for the year. And not too much per pot. Let it compost further during the coming months to benefit the new crops you'll grow next spring.

A layer of suitable organic material (mulch) may help protect the surface of an empty container, but keep it away from plant crowns and avoid materials that hold excessive moisture against stems. Use materials that stay in place and do not blow around in strong winds.

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10. Herbs In November

Herbs do not all respond to winter in the same way.

Herb	November Care
Parsley	Continue harvesting lightly from healthy established plants. Growth may slow.
Chives	Harvest sparingly while there is healthy growth. Do not expect summer-level production.
Thyme and rosemary	These are generally hardy herbs, but container-grown plants can be more exposed to freezing and waterlogging. Provide good drainage and shelter when needed.
Basil	Do not rely on it to continue outdoors through cold weather. If you want to keep it, bring it into a suitable bright, warm environment before cold damages it.

Mint can also be vulnerable to cold damage above ground, depending on the variety and conditions. If you want to preserve a particular plant, check its needs rather than assuming it will behave like a hardy outdoor herb.

For herbs kept indoors, remember that a windowsill is usually a good place to try them, but temperature and airflow also affect whether a plant continues to grow well.

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11. November Balcony Check-Up

Use this table for a quick inspection. You do not need to do everything in one session.

Check	What To Look For	Action If Needed
Harvests	Healthy leaves or usable crops ready to pick	Harvest selectively
Plant health	Rotting, damaged, or diseased foliage	Remove affected material
Potting mix	Containers staying wet for too long	Check drainage and adjust watering
Drainage holes	Blockages or standing water beneath pots	Clear holes and improve clearance
Wind exposure	Pots rocking, plants battered, covers loose	Secure or shelter vulnerable containers
Frost preparation	Vulnerable plants or pots before a cold spell	Prepare suitable protection
Finished crops	Empty containers or plants that have stopped producing	Decide whether to replant or prepare for spring
Winter crops	Established plants that are still healthy	Keep them in place and continue monitoring
Next season	Notes on what produced well and what struggled	Record observations while they are fresh

12. Make A Winter Production Plan

A useful winter plan does not need to be complicated. It is simply a way to keep track of what your containers are doing and avoid losing track of the next step.

For each container, answer three questions:

1. What is growing here now?
2. Can it keep producing through the coming weeks?
3. What should happen when it finishes?

Use the following table to make those decisions.

Container Status	Your Plan
Healthy and productive	Keep harvesting and maintain suitable conditions
Healthy but growing slowly	Leave it in place, adjust care, and monitor
Vulnerable to wind, frost, or excess rain	Improve shelter or protection where practical
Finished and empty	Replant only if conditions and crop choice justify it
Finished and being held for spring	Clean up, assess the potting mix, and prepare it appropriately

This is the Multi-Harvest Container System applied to winter: make good use of your available space, maintain healthy growing conditions, and think ahead

about the next crop (next year). In November, that may mean leaving a productive plant alone rather than immediately emptying its container.

It is also a good time to make a few notes. Which crops remained productive? Which containers stayed too wet? Which plants suffered from wind? What would you plant earlier next year? Those observations will make next season's decisions easier.

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13. November Balcony Growing Checklist

Use this as your monthly reference. You can tick off the tasks that apply to your balcony.

Your November Checklist

☐ Harvest ready crops and inspect established winter greens
☐ Remove rotting leaves and finished or unhealthy plants
☐ Check drainage holes and make sure containers can drain freely
☐ Adjust watering to the slower growth and wetter conditions
☐ Secure pots and protect vulnerable plants from severe weather
☐ Check whether any containers need protection from freezing
☐ Review garlic and other established crops without disturbing their roots unnecessarily

☐ Decide what to do with finished containers
☐ Refresh potting mix only where needed and appropriate
☐ Record which crops and containers are still productive
☐ Make a simple plan for winter harvests and spring planting

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14. November’s Main Lesson

Winterizing means preparing your balcony for winter, not abandoning it.

You can tidy your growing space, protect your containers, and continue harvesting at the same time. Keep healthy plants that are still productive, remove what is finished or unhealthy, and avoid forcing new growth when the conditions are no longer favorable.

A small harvest still counts. A healthy plant that continues producing slowly is still making use of your space.

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15. Looking Ahead To December

December brings even shorter days and often colder, wetter conditions. Growth may slow further, and the focus shifts toward maintaining established crops rather than trying to start a lot of new ones.

Next month, keep checking for harvestable leaves, monitor drainage after wet weather, and protect vulnerable plants and containers when severe frost is forecast. Use quieter periods to review what worked this year and prepare for the next growing season.

There is no need to keep every pot full all winter. The aim is to make sensible use of the space and conditions you have.

November In One Sentence

Keep what is productive, protect what needs it, and prepare what comes next.

About Me

I’m Jim, the gardener behind Balcony Food Factory.

I’ve been growing food for decades, from allotments to my current 10th-floor balcony, where I’ve learned how to grow a surprising amount of food in a surprisingly small space.

Balcony Food Factory is where I share what I’ve learned about growing more food in containers, making the most of limited space, and keeping things practical and manageable.

Have any questions? Anything I can help you with? I would love to hear from you!

Email me: info@balconyfoodfactory.com

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My New Book is out!

The Multi-Harvest Container System Starter Guide

