



# Jules Hudson

## COUNTRY ESCAPE

For Jules there's no such thing as 'the last mow of the season' – autumn's his busiest time in the garden. That way he can enjoy the fruits of his labours come spring

**I**'ve long been a keen gardener, ever since I set about transforming the bare plot of about an acre that surrounded my old home in the Cambrians over 20 years ago. Since then, my passion for gardening and the excuse it gives me to continue my lifelong love of being outdoors has grown like the weeds I'm constantly having to battle.

But I'm often asked at this time of year when I'm likely to stop mowing, a moment regarded by many as the signal that the gardening year has slowed sufficiently to at last put the whole thing to bed, and shut up shop for the winter.

Yet you may be surprised to learn that, for us, the winter months are, if anything, busier than the summer. And not just because we don't stop cutting the grass. As an old friend in Wales once dryly observed, sheep don't stop eating it, so why should we stop cutting it? And I took his point. We may cut a little higher, but it deals with the autumn leaf fall, and ensures that the garden looks cared for all year round, avoiding those frustrating months in the past when we were waiting for spring to come, just so that our first cut of the year could make the whole place look loved once again.

It's also a great time to plant, and just as importantly to prune. Throughout the summer months as the trees that dominate the garden fill with leaf, I keep an eye on those offending boughs and branches that may need some attention once they've dropped their final crop. It's an important opportunity to turn the results into hardwood logs for next winter, allowing them a year to season, and to chip or burn what's left over to add to the compost and shrinking heaps of grass clippings that just a few summer months ago looked sure to overwhelm us. The bonfire is also a great way to enjoy those winter days, extending the light as the nights draw in, warmed by numerous fires that turn the brash into ash that balances the pH in the compost, and accelerates the production of much needed mulch for our winter planting.

This year we think we may have finally beaten the scourge of ground elder that has run riot through our borders. Having stripped them

virtually bare over the last two years, we may at last be in a position to fill them up again. Cosy evenings by the wood burner are the perfect place to plan the planting, whilst crisp autumn days finally putting the new arrivals in the ground can't come soon enough.

“ Sheep don't stop eating it so why should we stop cutting it?”

Autumn and early winter are also the times to push through some of those hard-landscaping projects, because once again we know we can re-plant straight away, and as our gardening days aren't spent endlessly mowing, we've now got time for some exciting engineering and re-design; from fencing to hedging, walling, and even paving where needed. Of course much of this is even more dependent on the weather, but given the summer we've just had, I've always felt that the odds are even whatever the season in terms of getting a dry day to make the most of.

That said, a wet day is the perfect excuse to give all that equipment you've worked so hard over the summer a good dose of TLC and some much needed maintenance. Stripping down the mowers, oiling the tools and sharpening long-since blunted blades in the winter means that as soon as the new year arrives you can at last relax and watch the whole plot return to life. And that, after all, is what gardening is all about to most of us.

As I've learnt, buying time through the dark days of winter means that when they eventually come, the lighter days of spring are all the sweeter. 🌿

JULES HUDSON was born in Essex but stayed in Wales after studying archeology at Lampeter University. He has worked in television since 1996 and is a member of the *Countryfile* team, but is best-known as the leading face of *Escape To The Country*. He moved back across the Border in 2012, to Herefordshire.

You can follow Jules on Twitter @thejuleshudson, or visit his website at [www.juleshudson.com](http://www.juleshudson.com)

