

## **SOUTH & SOUTH EAST IN BLOOM PRACTICAL GARDENING TIPS AND ADVICE**

Welcome to the gardening checklist. To get us started here are some tasks and gardening advice along with some planting tips. From January, we'll provide a quarterly list of tasks and include some project work too.

### **WINTER TASKS**

Just like us, the garden wants to go into hibernation as the weather gets colder, but there are a number of things to do first.

#### **Winter/Spring bedding:**

Although it's getting a bit late to plant winter / spring bedding, you still can. Choose between Wallflowers; Bellis; Myosotis (Forget me not); Primula; Viola and Winter Pansies. Don't forget that if you include bulbs such as Tulips amongst your bedding, put the bulbs in after the plants to avoid them being chopped in half with the trowel! As a rough guide, plant bulbs to a depth of 2 ½ times their diameter.

#### **Beds & Borders:**

If you haven't got around to pruning your summer flowering shrubs yet, try to do so this month before the weather gets even colder.

Now is a good time to assess whether plants were successful last year and whether some need to go to make room for more appropriate plants that will best meet your scheme for next year.

When you have completed all your border work, which may have included planting pockets of spring flowering bulbs in any open area of the border, carefully and lightly fork the bed over, to relieve compaction and give a mulch of organic matter to keep weeds at bay and for the winter rains to wash nutrient into the soil from the organic matter.

#### **Herbaceous Plants:**

Remove stakes and supports from herbaceous and perennial plants. Cut down the old growth to ground level, unless there are seed heads beneficial to birds. If you have mature plants, you can lift and divide them to increase your stock, to fill in gaps elsewhere in the garden, give to friends and neighbours or create a new border or project using your surplus plants. To divide the rootball, dig it out and carefully insert two

forks back to back through the middle of the rootball and slowly prise the two halves apart. Replanting them to the same original depth.

### **Roses:**

It is good practice to reduce HTs roses by half their height (usually done in November) to reduce wind rock. The final prune should be done next March. For climbers, prune back this year's growth to 2 or 3 buds of the main frame. Apply this type of pruning to most climbing plants to maintain their shape.

If you want to increase the climber's framework, tie in some of the new shoots into the spaces you want to fill.

Specie roses - take out some of the older shoots at ground level, leaving newer growth to flowering next year.

### **WINTER PROJECT:**

#### **Tree, Shrub and Hedge Planting:**

November to March is the best time to plant bare-root trees, shrubs and hedging plants.

- **Trees:**

When selecting a tree, try to visualise what size it will be in a few year's time as often people select a tree that becomes too big for space. Also, consider the tree's eventual root spread and its proximity to buildings! When planting, always prepare the ground well, incorporating fresh compost and a slow release fertilizer.

Tree staking is a debatable subject. Some recommend a stake that supports the whole length of the stem. I prefer a much shorter stake that is only around two feet above ground so that the tree can sway naturally in the wind and trigger root growth thereby giving better support to the tree as it matures. You may consider putting an irrigation tube in with the tree's rootball to assist water penetration to the roots, helpful in the tree's first year, but if you can regularly water you may not need to.

Plant the tree at the same depth as when it was grown in the pot or nursery - note the existing soil mark on the stem. Planting too deep can rot the stem! Always spread the tree's roots out evenly into the hole, putting the stake in first to avoid damaging the trees roots. If containerised, loosen up the rootball carefully before placing in the hole.

Add the soil and compost mix slowly, carefully raising and lowering the tree slightly by the stem, as you fill the hole, so soil gets in between the roots. Start to firm the soil around the tree with your foot only after the roots are covered with soil, then fill the remaining hole and securing to the stake if used. I would suggest mulching around the tree base after planting to help keep it weed free. If the tree is to be planted in a lawn, a mulched base will help prevent mower damage to the bark, especially by mowers!

- **Shrubs:**

As with trees, always try to visualise the shrub's size in a few year's time and consider its position in the border. You don't want to end up with tall shrubs at the front of the border with smaller ones hidden at the back. Always prepare the ground well and incorporate new compost and a slow release fertilizer. Some nurseries offer planting compost with fertilizer already incorporated. Depending on what you are trying to achieve, I think it is good to have a selection of plants in the garden that flower at different times of the year so there is always something of interest to see. Similarly, it is good to have a mix of shrubs that have different leaf colours, considering autumn colour too. In the winter, there is nothing nicer than a clump of red-stemmed *Cornus siberica* with low winter sun shining on them!

- **Hedges:**

This is an ideal time to plant bare-root hedging plants. It is cheaper to buy as whips; you'll get more for your money and they will usually outperform containerised hedging plants in a short time. Prepare a trench incorporating organic matter and if you have enough space plant a double staggered row to get a good thick hedge. I would recommend planting a native hedging mix of Beech, Purple Beech, Copper Beech, Field Maple and Hawthorn, which will also attract wildlife to your garden.

**Tender Plants:**

If you cannot bring tender plants indoors, try protecting them in situ. For tree ferns, for example, tie up the fronds and add straw to the crown to protect from frost and snow. Straw can also be used to protect less hardy herbaceous plants too. Bubble wrap large pots and raise them off the ground to avoid waterlogging. You may consider putting a layer of bubble wrap in the greenhouse to give extra insulation. Give less hardy plants very little water during the winter months to minimize the risk of

them rotting and ventilate the greenhouse on fine sunny days, remembering to close the vents at night!

### **Greenhouses and those tender plants:**

This is a good time if the greenhouse is empty, to thoroughly clean it using Jeyes Fluid – an old fashioned and dependable solution, or use smokes to fumigate the greenhouse to eradicate pest and diseases. Tender plants can then be put into the sterilised greenhouse, such as Pelargoniums with perhaps a little heat, but keep them as dry as possible to avoid rot. Ventilate in milder weather to keep the air fresh and circulating. Try insulating your greenhouse with bubble wrap and save on heating!

### **Garden cleanliness:**

To discourage slugs and snails, keep paths regularly swept, remove debris from patios and decking and keep pots clean and free of dead leaves and detritus. At this time of year slugs and snails will hide in crevices and under rims of pots etc. Seek them and remove them – I'll leave you to decide what you do with them!

**Herbs:** if you have some less hardy herbs in the garden carefully lift and pot them up and bring them into your conservatory, greenhouse, or window ledge, to extend their life and give you fresh herbs for longer.

### **Christmas Decorations:**

As Christmas approaches, look around the garden to see what gems there are, to use for table decorations and look for berry plants such as holly and cotoneaster to make a wreath for the front door.

### **Don't forget:**

- Now is a good time to plant roses too, but not in beds that have had roses in them before, to avoid rose replant disease.
- Keep collecting those leaves off the lawn and from low growing plants and alpines and compost them if you can.
- Clean and sharpen mowers and hand tools over the winter period, ready for next year.

Enjoy your garden whatever the weather or the season!

Have a wonderful festive season and get more inspiration by looking at seed catalogues during the holiday!

**Next time** we'll move to a quarterly edition that will cover the gardening tasks from January through to March.

Reg Leach