



# ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

## MARCH

### monthly planner of jobs to do

March as everyone knows is the fickle month when snow, wind, rain and shirtsleeve sun can chase each other around in a single day. Like March blooms, March gardeners must be resilient to cope with constantly changing temperatures. However, the best of the month's flowers are also pretty and charming, as well as tough. Most of them are woodland plants that open before the leaf canopy closes and robs them of too much light. So early in the month, primroses and violets flower freely along with *Anemone blanda* and daffodils.

#### BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **By** the middle of March you should finish up the coppicing of your hazels. With *Corylus avellana* should be cut down to ground level on a seven or eight year cycle. Cut out everything - the stems are big and stout enough to make superb bean sticks. The shoots that are whippy and pliable make excellent woven supports for herbaceous plants.
- **Give** flower stems and climbers support now before they really begin to grow, as later the weight of flowers can cause them to droop to the ground. **1.** Place a frame over the clump with a metal grid for stems to grow through. Make sure the height of the frame suits the plant's growth. **2.** Weave a natural-looking frame from woody pruning's, leaving gaps over the top for the stems to grow through. **3.** Install tensioned horizontal wires onto walls and fences before the climbers start growing. Stems can be tied onto these.
- **Give** your garden an early boost of instant colour by heading to garden centres, where they will have spring flowers like primulas, bellis and wallflowers growing in pots that can be planted now. You can also buy flowering bulbs in pots to add to the mix. Plant them up in a container or put them into gaps in the border, where they will flower away for the next couple of months.
- **Weeding** now will allow young flower and vegetable plants to grow without competition, if you can do this once a week, you'll clear young weeds before they can flower and spread seed all over the garden again. Use a hoe to cut through them between the rows and hand weed among the young plants. A trowel will help to lift out the roots of persistent weeds.
- **Keep** grass edges clipped back to stop invaders and, if rain looks likely, pick up the weeds to stop them re-rooting.
- **The** success of spring sowings depends on the ground being warm enough. It needs to be at least 7°C during the day so use a soil thermometer or feel the soil surface, and choose the area that gets the most sun. Make sure the bed is free of weeds and rake the soil to a fine tilth before sowing.
- **If** you'd like a new lawn in an instant, now's the time to prepare the ground to lay turf. Growing from seed is cheaper but you'll need to wait until next month for the soil temperatures to rise enough for germination. You'll then have to wait several weeks for it to be ready to walk on. Make sure the surface tilth is raked fine but that underneath the soil is firm. The site can be sloping but the surface should be as level as possible to avoid future issues mowing uneven ground. Work from boards to keep the surface perfect and once the turf is laid, keep it watered while it becomes established. Turf can be walked on within two to three weeks.
- **Now** is an ideal time to fork in fertilisers, remove weeds and add mulch.
- **Assess** your lawn and take time to even out small bumps and dips. Cut through the uneven patch with an H-shape cut, and peel back turf. Either remove excess soil or add soil, then firm down and replace the turf.
- **As** well as using the leaves to make your own growth-promoting liquid fertiliser in summer comfrey is a useful groundcover plant as it will spread quickly. It is also good for pollinators.

- **Spread** a layer of well-rotted organic matter, ideally about 7.5cm thick around plants. Mulching will help to improve soil, suppress weeds, insulate plant roots from temperature fluctuations and conserve moisture in summer.
- **Cut** back and remove dead parts of ornamental grasses.
- **If** you have long term residents such as bay trees or box balls in your containers, scrape away the top few centimetres of compost. Replace it with fresh compost and give it a feed now.

### PESTS AND DISEASES

- **Damage** by slugs and snails is often at its worse in early spring, just as they come out of hibernation. Their food supply is limited in the garden or allotment, which makes your plants vulnerable. Take action by putting out traps of upturned pots, using nematodes once the soil has warmed to 5°C and putting down organic slug pellets.
- **Look** out for mealy bug which will start to get more active and breed as the weather gets warm. Wipe off to remove
- **As** the weather gets warmer, aphid and caterpillar populations can increase and become a problem. Check plants regularly and remove any early infestations by hand.
- **Spray** apples and pears against scab.
- **Watch** out for the creamy yellow caterpillars of the viburnum beetle feeding on new leaves of viburnum. The adults nibble viburnum leaves from spring to autumn.
- **Remove** any brassica leaves that begin to turn yellow. This will help to prevent the spread of grey mould and brassica downy mildew.

### WILDLIFE

- **Look** out for bumblebees emerging from hibernation. Move any found lying on the ground onto a flowering plant. If they are tired or unwell, this will provide them with a natural food source to replenish their energy level.
- **Remove** excess winter debris from your pond such as whole leaves and twigs. Leave it to dry at the edge of the pond so that any trapped wildlife can make its escape. Feeding fish little and often is best to avoid problems with algae.
- **Consider** identifying a suitable area of your garden to leave as a wildlife area. Even a small patch behind a shed will be beneficial.
- **Direct** sow hardy cornfield annuals, such as cornflower and corn marigold in spare, sunny areas of soil in the garden to help encourage pollinators.
- **Put** nesting material out for birds in a fat-ball cage - for example wool, hair groomed from pets, or even human hair.

### VEGETABLES/HERBS

- **Plant** out broad bean seedlings after hardening them off in double rows or blocks 20cm apart. To extend the harvest, you could also sow a second batch now.
- **Plant** out salad rocket plugs on warmer days, for a peppery harvest.
- **Sow** Sweet peppers in pots now either in a propagator or on a windowsill that gets plenty of sun. The seeds will germinate in two to three weeks.
- **Start** sowing cabbage seeds for an early summer harvest.
- **Give** pelargoniums liquid feed as new growth starts to appear. Follow instructions on the packet/bottle.
- **Beetroot** is easy to grow and now, as the ground begins to warm up, it can be sown directly into drills made with a hoe. Only sow seeds when the weather is favourable and not into damp chilly earth as they may succumb to rot, and those sown a week or two later in milder weather will always catch up. Sow a 1m row every couple of weeks between now and early July for a succession of tender roots.
- **Plant** out onion and garlic plugs that have been grown in the greenhouse when their roots fill their pots. These are hardy plants, but choose a mild spell of weather to do this. Water the plants before lifting them carefully out of their pots. Use a trowel to plant them in a row and keep at the same depth as they were in their pots. Firm them in well, then water again. They should be ready to harvest by high summer.
- **Harvest** the last of the chard now. The oldest leaves will be past their best now but fortunately, there will be a flush of spring growth before the plant runs into flower, signalling the end of the crop. So harvest the young leaves now. If you water the crop after harvesting you could get one more pick in before it flowers.

- **Harvest** your remaining leeks now, because if they run to flower, the leaves will be inedible. Use a fork to lift the leeks out of the ground. Before taking them into the kitchen, clean the plants by trimming off the roots and pulling off the outermost leaves which can be put straight onto the compost heap. If you want to let them flower to collect your own seed leave one or two in the row and collect the seed later in the summer.
- **Early** potatoes can be planted from mid-March in southern UK. Space them 30cm between the tubers and 60cm between rows. Plant them along a 10-15cm deep trench. Cover and water then, once the foliage starts to show, rake more soil up over the plants. Initially, this ridge will provide frost protection, and its base is where the new potatoes are formed. You should be digging out your first new potatoes by June.
- **The** success of spring sowings depends on the soil being warm and dry. Sow short rows of quick growing crops, such as radish and salad leaf, which can be harvested before the main crops are planted out in May.
- **Three** vegetables to grow this month are carrots which require a free-draining soil to grow. Sow into shallow drills. They take a fortnight to germinate in soil at around 10°C. Lettuce which germinates well at low temperatures so scatter seeds in a large pot to pick as salad leaves and protect from slugs. Parsley sown now can take a month to germinate. Pre-soak the seed in damp compost the day before, then space out in a tray.
- **Buy** and plant sage and rosemary to bulk up any gaps in your veg patch.
- **Dig** up overgrown mint or chives to divide and replant-or pot them up.
- **Harvest** forced rhubarb.
- **Plant** one-year-old dormant asparagus crowns this month. Prepare the ground well before planting by adding well-rotted organic matter.
- **Help** to maintain the vigour of herbs such as chives, lovage and mint by dividing clumps every few years.
- **Harvest** spring cabbages by cutting through the stem about 10cm above ground level. You can cut a 1cm deep cross into the remaining stem with a sharp knife to gain a second crop of tiny cabbages or 'spring greens'.
- **Early** spring is a good time to tidy up sage. This will encourage fresh growth rich in flavour if you use sage leaves all summer in the kitchen. Remove any dead or damaged plant material and cut around a third of old, woody stems to the base. Thin out crowded and crossing stems, aiming for an open, balanced shape. Mulch the plant after pruning or feed with a general-purpose fertiliser.
- **If** you want to grow horseradish in your garden it's easy to raise from pieces of the root, also called thongs. You can get them from online garden centres now. You could fit in around three thongs in a 30cm container. Fill the pot with multi-purpose compost and make a hole deep enough for the length of the thong, plus an extra 5cm layer of soil on top. Cover the hole with compost and then place in a sunny or partially shaded position.
- **Potatoes** can be grown in pots or bags to produce an early crop. For this reasons it's best to use early or second early varieties. You can get a good crop from a bag and tubers will be clean and should be free from slugs. Use old compost bags, giving them a second use. Roll bags down to form a 'pot' about 30cm high and make holes in the base. Add 15cm of compost and place two or three tubers on this, then cover with 10cm of compost. Water and keep frost free. Light isn't needed until shoots appear, so a shed will do.
- **Veg** to sow indoors this month. Aubergine, celery, cucumber, celeriac, globe artichoke, sweet pepper and tomato.
- **Veg** to sow outdoors this month. Beetroot, broad beans, carrots, cauliflower, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, parsnips, peas, radish, salad leaves, spinach, spring onions, summer cabbage, Swiss chard and turnips.
- **Tall** peas such as 'Golden Sweet', can be planted out now. Train them up a wigwam of canes. They should be ready to harvest in July and then can be replaced by a late crop of runner beans to make the most of the space.

## PLANTS/SHRUBS

- **If** you planted amaryllis (or hippeastrum) bulbs in January they should be blooming this month. To give them the best and longest lasting blooms, water frequently and feed with tomato fertiliser every 10 days. After flowering, continue the regime but stop in summer, keeping the plant dry until you want to start it into growth again in autumn.
- **Finish** pruning elder, late-flowering clematis, roses, buddleia and caryopteris.

- **It** is a good idea to get some annuals that will perform in high and late summer, sown and grown on. Always sow a batch of sunflowers in March and another a month later, for a succession of plants and in case some fail. Sow two or three per plug with the intention of removing all but the strongest and straightest seedlings after a few weeks. This should give plenty of healthy seedlings to grow, pot on, water and transplant. Put them in the greenhouse to germinate and then pot them on into 7cm pots, where they will remain until planted out somewhere between mid-May and mid-June.
- **The** soft new growth on fuchsias and other tender perennials growing under glass makes perfect, fast-rooting cuttings. Snip off the shoot and trim at the base just below a leaf joint. Remove all the leaves except the top set. Reduce the size of the leaves if necessary by cutting across the leaf blade. Firm the cutting into a pot of compost or a plug pellet, water. Then put into a propagator where it will root within a few weeks and can be planted outside for the summer.
- **Pot** up any plug plants that you buy as soon as you get them home to stop them drying out.
- **It's** easy to propagate snowdrops in your garden and now is the time to act. Dividing them 'in the green' means breaking up clumps while they're in leaf and replanting them. Overcrowded bulbs don't flower well, so by giving them more space you'll get a better display in years to come. Do this job every five years or so, rather than disturbing the plants annually.
- **While** the garden revs up for growth, some plants buck the trend. Many cyclamens sold for winter colour are cultivars of the tender *C.persicum* and, in their natural habitat; they're dormant during the scorching summer months. After their display in patio pots, or cool room in the house, is over they can be rested, then revived to flower again. Continue to water through March, while the foliage stays green and healthy, and feed fortnightly. Remove seed heads and reduce watering till leaves start to yellow. Place pots on their sides, under greenhouse staging, or anywhere fairly cool, dark and shaded. Begin watering again after 2-3 months, when new growth appears.
- **Cut** any rose bushes and hedges back by one third to a half. Cut diseased stems back to healthy growth. Prune established bush roses removing crossing dead and damaged wood, and prune the main stems to an outward facing bud around 15-20cm from ground level. Get your roses off to the best start by feeding them with a specialist rose fertiliser as they are heavy feeders. Check over climbing roses and tie in old or new growth that is not attached to the support.
- **The** youngest stems on dogwood have the brightest colours of red, orange or yellow, so if you prune them every year after the winter, you'll get the best colour on the newest growth the following year. Either coppice by cutting all the stems down to the ground and keeping the annual growth low, or thin out to encourage a higher shrub that still supports some new stems each year. Give the growth a boost with a top dressing of general fertiliser after.
- **Trim** back spent flowers on heathers, and trim lavenders. Do not cut into old wood on either.
- **Now** is a good time to move evergreen shrubs, such as Choisya, Hebe and Pittosporum. As the soil begins to warm up, roots will be able to re-establish quickly.
- **Pinch** off flowers and seed capsules as they fade but leave stems to die back naturally with the foliage. Leaves and flower stems both photosynthesise, helping to feed the bulb for next year's flowers.
- **Many** house plants benefit from repotting every few years and now is an ideal time to do it. Choose a pot one or two sizes larger than the original.
- **It's** the last chance to move shrubs before they are fully in growth. Lift and divide summer-flowering perennials such as Michaelmas daisies, Helenium and Rudbeckia now. Done every few years, this helps maintain health, vigorous growth. It is also a good way to propagate more plants and share them with friends. Plant into prepared, weed-free ground to the same depth as before. Support if necessary and keep well-watered to reduce stress.
- **It's** time to think about rooting your chrysanthemum cuttings, from now until the end of March. Take cuttings from your over-wintered stools (last year's plants). Using a sharp knife, cut off any green material as close to the bottom as you can. It does not matter if you have to take it off the stem. When you take the cuttings off the stools, try to take them at least 5-75cm in height. If your stools haven't over-wintered well and you don't have any cutting material, don't worry, as you can get an order from one of many chrysanthemum suppliers online. A peat mix is the best option for rooting cuttings, although you can get good results with coir compost. You can use rooting powder. Put your cuttings into a standard seed tray, then water them in and place them onto a propagator or a heated bench at a temperature of 15°C. On hot, sunny days your plants will benefit from being covered with a sheet of fleece to stop them wilting in the sun. Just keep an eye on them; they probably won't need watering

again for at least another week or two. It will take approximately 21 days for them to root, and then you will need to remove them from the heated bench and keep them in a frost free greenhouse.

- **Remove** brown camellia flowers by hand to keep your plants looking attractive.
- **If** your poinsettia has made it to now and is still looking good, with a little care you can keep it for this winter. Even if most of the leaves have dropped and there are just a few red bracts left, it's worth saving. Prune back shoots by about three quarters, back to a bud or leaf scar, rather like pruning a rose. Take care not to get sap into a cut skin or your eyes. Once the sap has dried you can safely take it out of a pot and repot in a slightly larger container.
- **The** exotic leaves and bright flowers of cannas are a joy in summer, perfect for large patio pots. They're most easily grown from rhizomes, which can be bought dry or save your own from the previous year. Cannas can flower all summer and the only limit to their display is cold weather, so it's best to start the rhizomes, in heat, as early as possible. If you've saved your own, trim off damaged parts and old leaves. Pot these and brought rhizomes in as small a pot as will fit, in fresh compost, with the rhizome horizontal and the old shoots proud of the compost. Water and place somewhere warm. Water sparingly until growth appears.
- **Sweet** peas sown indoors in February should now be ready to plant outside. If you haven't done already pinch out the main tip once they have two pairs of leaves to encourage side shoots to break out from side of plant
- **Deadhead** hydrangeas and cut back to just above a healthy bud.
- **Prune** winter-flowering jasmine to encourage new growth for next year's blooms.
- **Lift** overcrowded nerines and clean up bulbs before replanting, retaining as much of the root material as possible.
- **If** you had hyacinths or daffodils forced and flowering for Christmas, they can now be planted out in the garden-in future' they'll flower normally, a few weeks later. Wait for the foliage to die back before planting and plant the bulbs to a depth of twice their height.
- **Climbers** such as clematis can be propagated by layering. Pull a loose stem down to the soil and make an incision into the stem a few buds down from the tip, just below a bud. Pin this down and cover the wound with soil or compost, leaving the tip sticking out. Give it a good watering. It will root by early summer and can be detached in the autumn.
- **If** you buy packs of bare-root flowering perennials, these plants will arrive wrapped up and need potting and watering straight away to start them into growth. It's also a good idea to soak them in water for an hour before planting out They will keep for a day or two in the salad drawer of the fridge.
- **Sow** seeds of biennial plants foxglove and hollyhock.

## FRUIT

- **Hand** pollinate your strawberry flowers to ensure a good fruit harvest in a few months.
- **Start** watering pots of fruit trees as the weather warms up to prevent them drying out.
- **Mulch** around fruit trees, staying clear of the base of the trunk to avoid rotting or damage.
- **The** planting season spans from autumn through to spring, so you still have a little time left to plant pot-grown fruit bushes and trees. The advantage of choosing pot-grown plants is that they are safe in their containers if the site isn't ready or the weather is poor. They will already be trained into shape, too, so will need minimal pruning. Soft fruit such as blackcurrants, redcurrants and blueberries will not need stake supports, but trees or trained forms will. Use a low-angled stake or two posts with a crossbar so that you can avoid driving a stake through the rootball. Tease the roots out when you plant and keep watering as the weather warms up.
- **Fan-trained** and bush fig trees can be pruned to maintain the desired shape and size. Remove crossing or damaged branches and cut back any that are too long and bare to a 5cm stub to encourage new growth. Take care as the sap can be an irritant.
- **Finish** pruning fruit trees and bushes before leaf or flower buds burst open.
- **Plant** out potted-up strawberry runners from previous year. Prepare the ground by digging in organic matter.
- **Alpine** strawberries will give you a plentiful harvest and, as ever bearers, will fruit until the first frost. They need a period of cold before starting into growth so keep them in the freezer for around three weeks before sowing. Sow in trays filled with moist seed compost, then sprinkle the seeds evenly onto the surface - don't cover them as they need light to germinate. Placing the tray on a capillary matting will help to keep it evenly moist. Leave in a warm place like a greenhouse.

- **Keep** shelters in place over peaches and nectarines against peach leaf curl.
- **Raspberries** are shallow-rooted plants, so they really benefit from mulching to trap moisture in the soil surface, where they're most active. Any organic matter is ideal, such as garden compost or well-rotted manure before you put on the mulch, feed the plants with a general-purpose fertiliser, such as Vitax Q4 and Growmore, While the plants are still dormant, it's also a good time to move any that you want to use to fill gaps in the row, or buy some new plants

### GREENHOUSE/COLD FRAMES

- **Place** seedlings in cold frames for hardening off.
- **Now** is the time to provide your greenhouse with shading. It will help to keep temperatures down as day length increases and things heat up dramatically as summer arrives. Make sure the shade netting is clean, and then pin it up into the roof of the greenhouse using clips that fix into the channels of the glazing bars. Fleece is another option but will only last one season. Shade paint works well too but can be difficult to wash off at the end of the summer.
- **A** cloche, like a mini greenhouse, will warm up soil and give some protection to the earliest germinating seedlings. You can also plant out early tender crops, such as courgettes, later on, under cloches. Use a bell jar for small numbers or construct a fleece or polythene cloche tunnel to cover a row. The cloche cover will be needed until the frosts are over, but keep it on to protect plants from pests like flea beetle, on your radishes, turnips and early greens.
- **Invest** in a small heated propagator to start off annuals and tomatoes.
- **Ensure** greenhouses don't get too hot on bright days as seedlings may be damaged.
- **If** your succulents need more space to grow, repot them in free-draining compost now. Mix the compost 50:50 with grit. Either wear thick gloves or use an old padded envelope to hold the plant when repotting sharp cacti, agaves etc.
- **Ventilate** the greenhouse on warm days and keep the glass clean as possible to maximise the amount of light reaching young seedlings.
- **Pollinate** greenhouse apricots, nectarines and peaches. Tickle flowers daily with a soft brush gently transferring the pollen to each flower.