



# ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

## JANUARY

### monthly planner of jobs to do

January is the most wintry of all the months, but this is the month when the coming growing season should be planned. The dark days of December are being left behind, and there is always a sense of expectation as the garden very slowly starts to come alive. The weather is often cold and rainy and the days are still dark and short, although you will be able to work outside until after five o'clock and there is an undeniable sense of the move towards spring.

#### BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **Spring** is a good time to plant up new beds and borders so start planning now. Measure the size of the bed to calculate the right number of plants. Sketch a plan starting with some winter structure then adding spring, summer, then autumn interest for a year round display.
- **In** milder locations cover bare soil with clear polythene to prepare the ground for early sowing. This will help warm the soil.
- **Lime** soil to reduce its acidity and help prevent club root in brassicas.
- **Look** out for worm casts in grass. Avoid stepping on them and rake apart on the grass when the weather is dry enough to do so.
- **Make** a temporary path across the lawn to avoid damage to grass in wet and frosty weather.
- **Clean** up plant labels by scouring off last year's writing to re-use them. Clean plastic pots in readiness for planting on seedlings. Wash with some detergent or garden disinfectant in a bucket of warm water. Rinse thoroughly in cold water before using.
- **Keep** your tools in good working order. A stiff bristled hand brush and a can of all-purpose spray oil is all you need for routine care. A file and sharpener is handy for tools with blades. Brush off soil and debris wipe dry then spray the metal with oil. Use a file to hone the blade edge on spades and hoes to keep the working efficiently. Clean and spray oil on secateurs, loppers and shears too, then the blades can be sharpened with a sharpening stone or hand-held blade sharpener.
- **A** mower needs regular maintenance to keep it in top condition especially when using it in winter's damp conditions. Cleaning off all grass debris will prevent rusting and it's worth giving further protection by spraying lubricant over the moving parts, particularly to stop the blade mechanism seizing up. Give the spark plug a clean to make starting the engine trouble free.
- **Sweep** paths to avoid them becoming slippery.
- **Paint** wood preserve on sheds, greenhouses and fences in dry weather.
- **It's** essential to keep your supply of fresh water and food for birds topped up especially this time of year. Keep bird baths ice free and clean as mould and bacteria are harmful to birds so clean often. Use a kitchen scrubber with a mild detergent, wash down well with clean water and fill.
- **Keep** your Christmas tree alive by moving the pot outside into a sheltered part of the garden. Give it a good watering and prune any dead branches. Don't let it dry out and you will be able to reuse it next year.

#### VEGETABLES

- **Make** a plan of where you will grow your vegetables in 2021.
- **Sow** the first batch of chillies as they need a long growing period before they start to flower. They need underneath heat taking 2-3 weeks to germinate, followed by three weeks of growing before pricking out. Sow a further batch in February as insurance.
- **Carrots** germinate at temperatures above 7°C so early sowings in cold soil need some help so cover the seedlings with fleece.
- **Get** ahead by chitting your seed potatoes around six weeks before planting in March.

- **Broad** Bean plants will survive all but the hardest frosts so seeds started in trays now can be planted out when they are big enough, growing in trays improves germination and protects the seed from mice.
- **Sow** radishes in a heated propagator for early crops that can be planted in a few weeks.
- **Plant** spring/summer garlic cloves in modules and put them in a cold frame or cold greenhouse. They will soon shoot and be ready to plant out as soon as the roots have filled the cells.
- **Early** crops of lettuce can be started now by sowing seeds into module trays and placing in a propagator. Don't let them dry out and ensure they are in a light position.

### PLANTS/SHRUBS

- **Sweet** peas sown now make robust plants that flower earlier than those sown outside in March. Choose a deep pot for good root growth and after germination keep the plants cool so that roots develop before the shoots really take off. Pinch out the top of seedlings to three or four leaves to encourage the formation of several strong flowering stems per plant.
- **Pot** up lily bulbs for early flowers indoors.
- **Move** containers of tender plants close to the house walls, wrap with Horticultural Fleece.
- **Prune** and tidy established fuchsias.
- **Tie** in climbers such as jasmine to prevent damage from wind and cut back any dead leaves and stems.
- **Give** wisteria its winter prune.
- **Prune** elders back hard to benefit from fresh foliage in spring.
- **Some** shrubs last longer and produce better flowers or fruit on strong framework if they are pruned using a renewal system. This means that every year, when the plant is dormant you take out a few of the oldest branches to encourage more juvenile shoots to take their place. Blackcurrants and thicket forming shrubs are typically pruned this way. If you have cut a lot of branches from a shrub remember to feed it in spring.

### FRUIT

- **Bring** inside pots of strawberries that you want to force to fruit early, place in as much light as possible.
- **Regularly** unwrap and check that any stored fruit is firm and undamaged. Remove any rotting or diseased fruit as the problem is likely to spread quickly throughout the entire crop harvest.
- **Keep** taking hardwood cuttings of fruit bushes such as gooseberries, to renew your stock.
- **This** is the time to plant bare rooted fruit trees and bushes as this dormant period causes the least amount of stress to the plant. Use Mycorrhizal Fungi Powder (Rootgrow) around the roots of the trees and bushes to help them get established.

### GREENHOUSE/COLD FRAMES

- **Give** inside a good sweep including staging paying attention to nooks, crannies and corners where pests and diseases tend to hide.
- **Clean** gutters.
- **Check** heaters are working properly.
- **Even** a light covering of snow on the greenhouse reduces the light getting to your plants inside. If the snow persists the structure also has to stand the weight. Brush the snow off daily with a long-handled broom then give it a final clean with a window cleaning blade when the snow is over.
- **Check** for mice in the greenhouse. Keep them out by filling in gaps in walls or doors.
- **Examine** plants for pests and diseases especially grey mould which is prevalent on plants grown under glass, where it is warm and humid. Avoid it by keeping plants spaced out and taking dead material off plants.
- **Watch** out for Vine Weevil larvae in pots and destroy.
- **Having** passed the shortest day of the year and as the days get progressively longer plants in the greenhouse will begin to come into growth again. They don't need much water yet so avoid over watering.
- **Keep** alpines safe from waterlogging.
- **Bring** forced bulbs on until they flower.
- **Pot** up hardy herbs like chives, parsley and mint.
- **Protect** tender perennials like fuchsias and pelargoniums.
- **Grow** lettuce for delicious winter leaves.
- **Open** cold frames on warmer days.