



ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION SALISBURY

FEBRUARY

monthly planner of jobs to do

February can be one of the coldest months of the year, with afternoon temperatures not rising much above freezing. Blustery winds can bring heavy snow fall too. However in a milder February with days lengthening afternoon temperatures can reach 10c in the South of England.

BASIC GARDENING JOBS

- **The** composting process naturally slows down during the colder winter weather. To help give it a boost, stir your compost heap and aerator tool or dig it out and refill it. This will reduce compaction and speed up rotting.
- **Add** organic matter to improve your soil by simply spreading it on the surface in a layer roughly 3-5cm deep. Spent mushroom compost, well-rotted manure and garden compost all are ideal. Check the manure for weed killer before using it by filling a small pot with it and sowing a broad bean. If the broad bean seedling is distorted, do not use the manure.
- **Freshen** up your lawn edges by re-cutting them with a half-moon tool or a spade. Use taut string line as a guide for straight edges or a hose for curved edges. Your garden will look instantly neater.
- **Prepare** for sowing seeds and potting up plug plants with fresh compost. Buy fresh, as it deteriorates in the bag over time. Store in a shed or garage so it doesn't get wet.
- **Check** all your tree stakes and fruit supports are stable and repair if necessary while plants are dormant.
- **Warm** the soil where you will be planting your crops grown from seed by covering with black plastic or cardboard.
- **Continue** to fill your runner bean trenches with green vegetable trimmings.
- **Finish** planning this year's crop rotation.
- **Get** your soil into good shape now. First weed thoroughly using a trowel or hand fork, then dig your plot over if it is not waterlogged or frozen, incorporating compost or manure if required. Break up any lumps of soil as you go and level the surface. Aim to create a firm surface with a fine, crumbly texture. If the soil is just a little bit wet, use a plank to stand on while you dig, to spread your weight evenly.
- **Done** every few years, coppicing hazel at this time produces strong, straight stems that are ideal as bean poles or supports for ornamental climbers. Weave together smaller branches for staking herbaceous perennials.
- **Save** old newspapers for making small pots for seed sowing. Cylindrical objects of different sizes can be used as moulds.
- **To** reduce plastic use, source plants that have been grown and are sold in biodegradable pots. Rather than buying plastic seed trays, consider wooden ones or make your own from old wooden pallets, fruit boxes or crates.
- **Now** is a good time to install compost bins or bays. Home composting is the most environmentally friendly way of dealing with garden waste. Position bins in partial shade, directly onto soil to allow drainage and access for vital soil organisms.
- **Make** up compost mixes ready to start spring propagation.
- **Bring** a few primulas indoors to force into early flower on a cool windowsill.
- **Go** through your plant supports now and make sure they are strong enough to hold everything up this season. Mend them as necessary. Bamboo canes make very strong structures and can be bound into shapes and tied with wire, cable ties or garden string to make new supports.
- **Give** your borders their annual boost by adding fertiliser - a one-off feed now will last all season. Organic fertilisers release nutrients slowly and help the health of the soil by stimulating microbes.

Spread composted manure on beds to add nutrients and humus. Bonemeal is useful at the planting stage, but a sprinkling of blood, fish and bonemeal a balanced feed for everything. Apply at the rated stated on the instructions. For animal free products, try seaweed meal, rock phosphate, comfrey pellets and your own garden compost

- **Remove** sucker growth from the base of young trees, roses and hazel.
- **Order** plug plants now for the best range of options.
- **Turf** laid now looks good straight away and can be walked on by the time the growing season starts. Turf is a good option to establish or repair a lawn at this time of year, as seed-sown lawns can take weeks to germinate when the ground is cold. Lawn grass is tough, but don't lay turf on waterlogged or frozen ground.

PESTS AND DISEASES

- **Mice** and rats love to dig up and eat newly planted broad beans, early pea seeds and garlic.
- **Slugs** can still be a problem even in February.
- **Pigeons** are hungry and love eating brassicas so keep them netted. Make sure the netting is secure to avoid animals getting caught in it.
- **Bull** finches love the new buds on gooseberries, so net them early.
- **Check** apple and pear trees for signs of canker and cut out any diseased wood.
- **Check** for 'big bud mite' on blackcurrants. The buds will actually look big and swollen if affected.
- **Rabbits** and deer can both damage plants as food resources run low. Wire netting is the best way to keep them out. Alternatively, put guards on young trees.
- **Check** plants for early greenfly and wipe off with damp tissue or fingers

WILDLIFE

- **Before** new birds move in, clear out any old nest material and give the box a good scrub, using boiling water to kill any germs. Buy a nest box made of wood or woodcrete as both provide good insulation. Check that the hole is at least 12cm above the floor and that you can access the inside to clean it. Site it away from birdfeeders, 1-3m above the ground on a tree trunk, in a spot where cats and squirrels aren't likely to get in.
- **Don't** forget to feed the birds and top up water for them to drink.
- **Deciduous** hedges should be pruned this month before birds start nesting. March to August is the main breeding season for nesting birds but always check for nests before carrying out work.
- **Place** stones in the bird bath to allow small birds to access the water more easily.
- **Check** the pond regularly to ensure it doesn't completely freeze over.

VEGETABLES

- **Feed** Spring Cabbage with a high nitrogen fertiliser such as pelleted poultry manure.
- **Plant** Jerusalem Artichokes 12cm deep and 30cm apart. It's an easy to grow vegetable that reaches 2mtrs tall and can make a useful wind break.
- **Mid-February** is the start of the veg-sowing season, but don't sow everything at once. It's still early in the season, so begin with early varieties of Kohl Rabi, brussel sprouts, sprouting broccoli spring onions, beetroot, lettuce, salad leaves, leeks, radish, coriander, parsley, basil, greenhouse tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, chilli, sweet peppers and spinach. Sow in module trays or pots, indoors, label and use a heated propagator plant out when they're big enough to handle.
- **Get** ahead by 'chitting' your seed potatoes by putting them in a tray and leaving them in a light, frost free place. Make sure you label each tray if you're growing more than one variety.
- **If** you did not plant garlic in the autumn, put in some cloves now so they still get a period of cold. Space them 15cm apart in rows 30cm apart. Bury them just under the surface so birds don't pull them out.
- **'Force'** rhubarb by covering the crown with an upside down dustbin.
- **Vegetables** and salads to harvest: Brussels, kale, cabbages, parsnips, celeriac, leeks, cauliflowers, swedes, Jerusalem artichokes, hardy lettuces, corn salad, land cress, and winter purslane, mizuna, chicory, endive and early sprouting broccoli
- **Hardy** peas can be planted outside in milder areas or undercover.
- **Broad** beans can be sown outside if the soil is not frozen or waterlogged.
- **Onions** can be grown from seed in modules, but they must have a minimum temperature of 10c
- **Shallots** can be planted out this month as long as the ground is not frozen or waterlogged or you may prefer to start them off in modules in the greenhouse.
- **Keep** removing any yellow fallen leaves around your brassicas as these can harbour pests.

- **Continue** to cover the white cauliflowers with their green leaves bent over them, to protect them from frost and light.
- **Force** sea kale (*Crambe maritima*) by covering with an upturned pot or forcing pot to exclude light. Pick blanched shoots at about 15cm long. After four weeks, uncover the plant for normal growth to resume.

PLANTS/SHRUBS

- **There's** still time to plant bare-root trees and shrubs, but be quick as they're only available during the dormant season.
- **Sow** hardy annuals such as scabious, calendula and nigella, from seed by sowing them in modular trays indoors. They're hardy enough to be plant out when they're big enough to handle.
- **Cut** off Hellebore leaves at ground level, being careful not to damage the flowers among them. It will not only help you to see the blooms more clearly, but also reduce any fungal diseases on the leaves.
- **Epimedium** spring perennials will be coming into bloom soon, so cut back all the leaves to ground level so the blooms aren't hidden in the foliage. Be careful not to damage the emerging flowers.
- **Tie** in climbers such as jasmine to prevent damage from wind and cut back any dead leaves and stems.
- **Winter** aconite (*eranthis*) forms carpets of yellow flowers at this time of year, and now is the best time to plant it if you'd like to grow in your garden. Plants always establish more successfully if planted in the 'green' than dry corms planted in the autumn. It does best in clay soil rather than well-drained dry soil.
- **Prune** late summer and autumn flowering Clematis to the lowest pair of healthy buds.
- **Start** fuchsias growing again by spraying with water on warmer days to encourage new growth and moving over wintering plants into a sunny spot.
- **There** is still time to plant lily bulbs in containers for an attractive display in summer
- **Plant** dahlia tubers in a shallow tray of potting compost in a light warm place. When shoots reach 2.5cm, divide the tubers, pot up and grow on in frost free conditions until planting out in early July.
- **Encourage** healthy growth and flowering by feeding hungry plants such as roses and clematis with a general-purpose fertiliser or rose fertiliser later this month.
- **As** new growth starts to emerge, remove old stems completely from herbaceous perennials that were left for winter interest.
- **Lawns** may need mowing soon. Use a high setting and avoid mowing wet or frosty grass, or if ground conditions are too soft.
- **Continue** to deadhead winter pansies and other bedding to encourage flowering.
- **Divide** and replant snowdrops once flowers have gone over but while green foliage remains.
- **Plant** dormant lily-of-the-valley crowns with tops poking just above the ground. Spots between shrubs are ideal.
- **Winter** flowering heathers are ready for a trim. If you do it now
- **Root** cuttings are taken when the plant is dormant and oriental poppies, phlox and primulas are all ideal candidates. Use John Innes No.1 compost using a pot or module tray. Water then place in a sheltered spot where they will shoot in the spring.
- **Winter-flowering** heathers are ready for a trim. Use shears to trim back last year's growth forming it into neat moulds. It will refresh all the flowering wood for next year and the plant itself will last for years longer.
- **Spruce** up your containers ready for the season ahead. The surface compost can get weedy and compacted by watering, so clean it up by gently tickling the surface with a trowel and removing a few handfuls of compost without disturbing any roots. Replace this with fresh John Innes potting compost, firm it down, then protect the surface with a decorative layer of gravel or chippings. Finally give a good soak with the watering can.
- **As** spring bulbs such as daffodils start to come up, ensure mulch and leaf litter are cleared around them. This will help avoid the new growth rotting off and prevent plants being trodden on.
- **Canna** plants will add a wondrous exoticism to your garden. They need protection over winter so only southerly gardeners will be able to leave them in beds all year. Either grow them in pots or lift them when they're cut back in the autumn and protect for the winter. Start them off in the greenhouse before putting back outside.
- **Brush** any snow off evergreen hedges to avoid weight damage.
- **Plant** new climbers with root about 20cm away from walls or fences.

FRUIT

- **Cut** down autumn raspberries to just above ground level, as they produce fruit on new growth during the summer
- **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.
- **Feed** fruit trees, bush and cane fruit with a high potash feed of blood, fish and bone and then mulch
- **If** you grow apricots, peaches or nectarines in a sheltered, south facing, spot, then they may start to blossom in February. Cover them with horticultural fleece to protect them from rain and frost. As insects are scarce this time of year you may have to hand pollinate the flowers using a soft paintbrush
- **Finish** pruning fruit trees and bushes (except cherries and plums) unless the weather has turned very cold. They start to come out of their dormancy in March
- **Prune** citrus trees by thinning out overcrowded branches and prune back straggly branches by up to two thirds.
- **Cover** strawberries with horticultural fleece for early flowering and fruit

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** out 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.
- Harden off any new plants grown inside the greenhouse using a cold frame. Don't plant out any tender ones yet.
- **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.
- **Repot** houseplants and tender perennials under glass if required.