

DECEMBER - Jobs To Do

Flower Garden:

- Plant **Tulips** and **Alliums**, if not already done;
- Deadhead winter-flowering **Pansies** and **Violas** to encourage more flowering;
- Pinch out tips of autumn-sown **Sweet Pea** seedlings once they have 2 pairs of leaves to encourage lateral growth to provide a bushier plant - if left, the original shoot often won't flower;
- Continue to take root cuttings now and throughout the winter of plants such as **Papaver** (perennial poppies), **Verbascum** (mullein) and **Phlox**;
- Take **hardwood cuttings** about 8"(20cm) in length of deciduous shrubs such as Viburnum and Callicarpa;
- Remove any leaves with blackspots on them from **Hellebores**, as this is a fungal disease; place bark chippings around the plants to protect the delicate blooms;
- Move **borderline hardy plants** into the greenhouse, if not already done;
- **Mulch** over-wintering outside tender plants, such as Dahlias, Agapanthus and Gladioli with bark chippings, or other such material;
- Raise **containers** off the ground onto feet/tiles or bricks to prevent waterlogging and insulate with bubblewrap if containers aren't frost hardy;
- Cut back tall shrubs such as **Buddleia, Lavatera** and **Roses** by approximately ½ to protect against wind-rock, if not done in November;
- Plant bare-rooted **Roses**, soaking the rootball in water for approximately 1 hour before planting;
- Continue clearing **leaves**, especially from the grass and around alpines, and store (but they must be wet) in black sacks forked with holes, or an open container made with chicken wire etc, to make **leafmould** for next year.

Vegetable Garden:

- Herbs such as **Basil, Dill, Chives** and **Parsley** can be sown indoors for winter use;
- Winter-hardy **salad leaves** such as Lettuce Winter Gem and Arctic King can be sown under cover;
- To maintain a supply of **Mint** over winter, dig up a small patch of roots and coil them across the surface of a pot of multi-purpose compost. Cover with more compost and keep on a cool, sunny windowsill indoors. They should then start to shoot in a couple of weeks;
- Protect **Brassicas** and **Broad Beans** with netting to thwart hungry pigeons;
- Earth up **Brussel Sprout** stems if unsteady and remove any brown/yellow leaves to avoid spreading grey mould;
- Continue **winter digging** to allow the frost to break down your soil, adding well-rotted manure or home-made compost. Digging the soil, especially bare patches or newly cultivated land, will expose pest larvae and eggs to birds and frosts, as well as clearing weeds and improving soil structure.

Fruit:

- Continue to plant **Raspberry** canes, **Gooseberries**, **Currants** and **Strawberries**;
- Plant **Blueberries** in an acid soil and remember to water them with rainwater, rather than tap water;
- Prune **Gooseberry** bushes and **red** and **white currants** by shortening the new growth at the tip of each main branch by half and cutting side-shoots to within two buds of the main stem. Also prune **Blackcurrants** if you didn't do it during summer;
- Check ties and supports for **fruit trees** and adjust/replace if necessary;
- Renew **greasebands** on trunks of fruit trees, if necessary;
- Force **Rhubarb** to produce a tender, early crop – insulate the crown with straw to create a warmer environment, which will encourage the rhubarb to grow, and then cover the clump with a purpose-made forcing pot or an upturned dustbin;
- Prune outdoor **grapevines** before Christmas.

Lawn:

- Continue aerating your lawn with a fork if it has been compacted in wet weather;
- Avoid walking on your lawn if it is very wet or frosted to limit any damage.

General:

- Remove dead leaves and debris from **greenhouse gutters**, so they don't block downpipes;
- If you're thinking about buying a **Poinsettia**, don't be tempted to buy a cheaper one that's been stored in the open, as they like the warmth. At home, position it in a well-lit spot, away from draughts;
- Lag outside **water taps** and pipes, draining them first.