

MARCH - Jobs to Do

Flower Garden:

- 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 (6-8") from ground level;
- Prune **shrubs** such as Buddleia (butterfly bush), hardy Fuchsias, Mahonia (after flowering), Escallonia, Cornus, deciduous Viburnums, Lavender (if not clipped back after flowering last year) and Caryopteris, then add a general fertiliser such as Growmore and mulch around the base with garden compost or manure (but don't let the mulch rest against the stems);
- Divide overgrown **herbaceous perennials** and **ornamental grasses**: Lift the plant and either break the clump into two pieces (or more depending on its size) or chop it into sections with a spade, but replant the new plants without delay so they don't dry out and improve the soil with compost and a handful of blood, fish and bone - any spare plants would be welcome at our **Plant Sale** being held on Sunday 21 May (further details to be published in our Spring Newsletter);
- Cut back (and compost) dead stems of **herbaceous perennials** such as Sedums to make way for green shoots and apply a general-purpose fertiliser;
- **Sweet peas** can now be sown outside where you want them to flower;
- Take **cuttings** of **Delphiniums** and **Lupins**, using new shoots emerging from the base of the plant and cut them from just below soil level with a sharp knife. Insert the cuttings into pots of compost and put the pot in a clear plastic bag in the greenhouse and the cuttings should root in a few weeks;
- Dig up **Hellebore seedlings** and pot them up to grow on – any spares would be welcome, along with any other spare plants and seedlings for sale at our **Plant Sale** in May or for general sale to members in the outside Barn area of the Trading Centre, with proceeds going to our 2017 charity;
- Prevent **slug** and **snail** attack by using barriers such as copper tape to protect container plants. Copper rings, beer traps (using beer dregs only of course!) and sparing use of metaldehyde pellets can protect plants in the ground;
- Remove **Daffodil** flower heads once they've finished flowering. This will make the bulbs put their energy into next year's display instead of making seeds, but don't cut back the foliage yet (or worse, tie it into knots!) – wait until it's turned brown when it can be easily pulled away. Remember also, to give them a general-purpose feed.
- Prune late-flowering **Clematis** back to a pair of buds 15-30cm (6-12") above the base;
- Sow **hardy Annuals** towards the end of the month.

Vegetable Garden:

- Plant out **white Onion sets**, provided the soil has warmed up, but not in ground used for onions in the last three years to prevent disease problems building up (leave the red sets until the end of the month or early April) - **see the Fact Sheet on our website on Crop Rotation**;
- Plant out **Broad Beans** and **Peas** that were sown in the greenhouse or coldframe;
- Towards the end of the month, plant out **early Potatoes - see the Fact Sheet on our website on growing Potatoes**;
- Sow in an unheated greenhouse or coldframe **Salad Leaves, Leeks**, **Lettuces**, **Onions** and **Brussels Sprouts**, **Cabbages**, **Cauliflowers** and **Peas** to give them a head start over outdoor sowings;
- Sow outdoors **Broad Beans**, **Radishes**, **Spinach, Spring Onions** and **early Carrots (**such as **Nantes) once the soil temperature has reached 6°C**;
- Make further indoor sowings of **Tomatoes**, **Peppers**, **Chillis** and **Cucumbers** for planting outside at the end of May;
- Towards the end of the month, sow early varieties of **Beetroot** and **Turnip**.
- Use a **high-nitrogen fertiliser** such as Growmore, Blood Fish and Bone or pelleted chicken manure (available from the Trading Centre) to give **Spring Cabbage** plants a boost - **see the Fact Sheet on our website on Fertilisers**;
- Keep on top of **weed control** and continue through to summer by: **Hoeing**: Run a hoe over a bed or between rows to kill most weed seedlings, choosing a dry day with little wind for maximum effectiveness, so that the seedlings will dry out on the surface of the bed rather than re-rooting into moist soil. **Hand-weeding** with a fork: Pull up annual weeds by hand before they set seed and dig out perennial weeds with as much root (or bulb) as possible. Note that persistent weeds such as bindweed or couch grass will re-grow where small root sections are left behind.

Fruit:

- Shorten tips of summer-fruiting varieties of **Raspberries** if they have outgrown their supports, **feed** with a **general fertiliser** that is high in potash (for flowers) and nitrate of chalk (for foliage) [the Trading Centre team will be able to advise on which to use] and **mulch** with organic material, such as garden compost or well-rotted manure;
- Feed **Rhubarb** with a nitrogen-rich fertiliser and mulch the plants to retain moisture.

Lawn:

- Spike the lawn with a fork to **improve drainage** and **aerate** it;
- If you didn't do it in the autumn and the lawn isn't too wet to walk on, use a spring-tine **rake** to remove moss and thatch (dead grass), preferably before you do your first **mow**. Leave the mower blades on their highest setting for the first cut and wait until April to feed the lawn, though it will possibly require additional feeding as nutrients may have been washed out by winter rain;
- Prepare site for a **new lawn** if turfing (leave seeding until next month).