

Gardening tips for January

Happy New (gardening) Year from EGRGA

Should I use peat in my garden? The simple answer is no, can I still buy it – yes. The ban on retail sales won't come into effect until the end of 2024 with commercial use being banned by the end of 2030, a considerable delay to the government's initial plans. The environmental impact is huge with millions of tons of CO2 going into the atmosphere every year because gardeners choose to garden. If you want to do your bit to help, don't buy peat, many garden centres have now stopped selling peat-based products, also choose to buy plants grown in alternatives, if peat grown plants are left in the garden centres growers will soon get the message.

As we continue to eat and drink up the remains of our over indulgencies from Christmas and the New Year festivities, getting stupefied in front of the TV, watching Morcombe and Wise and old films, it must be time to get outside and put a stop to the hibernation.

If you have a garden, time to get thinking of what to do in it this year. If not, time just to get outside and enjoy the open air with a good walk, taking you past a good pub, or a good café or a good brewery, we are well provided for in Rudgwick.

If gardening is your thing in January, it is time to sort through all the old seed packets and think about replacing those that expired before this millennium. If buying new seeds, how about doing something different, newer varieties of vegetables that may be more disease resistant or a change in colour for flowering annuals.

Don't forget the wildlife, gardening for wildlife had become very popular in recent years and involves more than forgetting to cut the grass! If this is for you consider planting trees, climbing shrubs, anything that produces berries, using fewer chemicals, or organic alternatives, putting up bird feeders and planting flowering herbs and don't be too zealous at keeping the garden tidy. This last tip is the easiest to achieve but can annoy the neighbours.

The kitchen garden

Does anyone still force rhubarb? January can be a quiet time on the veg patch so if you have an established clump of rhubarb, it could be worth forcing it to produce early sweeter stems. A large, upturned bucket will suffice or for a more decorative appeal, use a rhubarb forcer (warning - they can be very expensive). Ensure the rhubarb crown is visible and mulch around the crown

with manure but keep the crown exposed otherwise bacterial or fungal rot could set in. Cover the prepared crown with your upturned bucket or forcer and wait about 8 weeks. The stems are ready to pull when the pale leaves have started to unfurl. Remove the forcer and harvest your rhubarb only taking about half the crop, remove the toxic leaves and store the forcer for use next year. Remember which rhubarb crown was forced and choose a different one the following year.

The flower garden

Make the most of your hellebores by removing old leaves to expose the flowers. Ornamental grasses should be cut back to allow for new growth. Winter-germinating weeds such as bittercress and groundsel will be making an appearance around now so hoe or rake to remove.

Prune roses while they are dormant. Cut back to just above an outward facing bud and remove any crossing or dead/diseased branches.

If it snows be ready to get outside and give any plant a shake if it looks like the weight of snow could cause damage.

Lawns

The best lawn care at this time of year is to keep off it, particularly if waterlogged. If waterlogged and you feel the urge spike the surface with a garden fork pushing in as far as you can, giving it a good wiggle before withdrawing and starting again. Any standing water should now disappear. If you want to go one stage further, encourage some horticultural sand (sharp sand will do) down your fork holes, this should keep the drainage working for longer. Make a note to repeat in the autumn before the next round of boggiess.

Ponds

Remove any leaves as their breakdown will provide perfect nutrition for blanket weed once the weather starts to improve. If you have a water feature it may be worth looking at the filter, it could be clogged up so give it a clean.

For membership details and to ask garden related questions please go to our website www.gardenreg.org.

And as always, keep gardening.

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