

Gardening tips for May

It is that time of year again when planting needs to be done but the weather may not be suitable, perhaps the gardener should just get on with the gardening tasks whatever the weather.

The kitchen garden

Knowing what to plant and when used to be the preserve of the professional gardener. These days, we have gardening programmes, millions of dead trees worth of gardening books and the internet. So, knowing what to plant and when should be easy enough to work out. The easiest source of advice is the back of a seed packet and planting seeds is a rewarding and cost-effective approach to gardening rather than frequenting the garden centre and handing over your money for lovely looking plants that are a month or two ahead of the season and therefore may not last.

Tomatoes

Blight resistant tomato varieties have certainly become popular, seed catalogues have an ever-increasing number of new varieties. It is always worth planting at least half blight resistant varieties if planting outdoors. This year I'm trying a new hybrid called Burlesque which is a beefsteak type of tomato, I'll plant some in the greenhouse and some outside and see if the tomatoes are anywhere near as big as the picture on the seed packet. If they are any good, you may see them at the EGRGA Autumn Show!

The flower garden

Time to start planting up hanging baskets if you have somewhere sheltered to keep them until established. The basket will need a liner to retain the contents. The easiest way to line a hanging basket is to buy a preformed liner made from coir, jute or wool. To help retain water, line the liner with old newspaper or plastic sheet such as a shopping bag (see below) and add suitable compost mixed with slow-release fertiliser and water-retaining crystals. If all this sounds a bit of an effort, pre-made hanging baskets are readily available at a price.

What to put in them? Traditionally, hanging baskets are vibrant blooming displays of summer bedding, however, why not do something different. How about a basket planted with a salad crop, herbs, vegetables or fruit. If planting vegetables or fruit it is essential that the basket doesn't dry out and therefore in this case use a sheet of plastic to help retain moisture. If using fruit such as tomatoes (a tumbling variety) don't stuff the basket as you would with bedding plants, leave a bit of space for the plants to grow. And to get your own back

on those pesky slugs, how about a strawberry hanging basket and see if they can rise to the challenge.

Lawns

An update on No Mow May for those of you who like to preserve and encourage wildlife or just need an excuse not to cut the grass; this has become a lot more complicated. No Mow May is now followed by No Mow July and not mowing is not really in the spirit of not mowing! So, the idea is for the gardener to choose which bit of the lawn to leave to grow for May and other areas to cut but leaving the grass about 3 to 5 cm, the reason being, some plant species such as daisy have adapted to growing in shorter grass. In June, you wizz around with the mower just to see if it still works and then put it away again until the end of July by which time the lawn should be full of flowering clover. If not mowing the lawn is an anathema, then mow as needed but aim to leave it longer than usual, around 5 cm will give a nice stripy verdant lawn with a bit of colour from the low growing weeds.

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Keep gardening.

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