

## **Gardening tips for December**

The gardening winter has begun and following the rain in October and November and three named storms the weather can't get much worse so head into the garden to do all those tidying up jobs put off from last month. If nothing else, top up the sherry bottle in the shed and protect outside taps from frost.

December is the month for indoor plants so a few words about the favourites.

Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera*), don't overwater, when in bud don't let dry out, mist 2 or 3 time a week, leave on an east or west facing windowsill and don't move (the plant that is). When flowering has finished, reduce watering until buds form the following autumn.

Poinsettia (or advent plant - because they always seem to lose a leave every day during December), keep in a bright position with soil moist only watering a little when the soil surface has dried out and the plant feels lighter that it was. Maintain temperature above 18C to stop the leaves and bracts (the colourful parts) from falling off.

Amaryllis, only plant a firm bulb, you don't want a floppy one, a firm intact base and a dry skin, avoid if damp - a sign of rot. Plant onto wet but free draining compost spreading the roots out leaving one third of the bulb above the surface. Place somewhere bright but not direct sunlight, about 20C is ideal temperature; to prevent the flower stalk bending keep rotating the pot. Water when the compost feels dry and feed every 2 weeks.

### **The Kitchen Garden**

If not waterlogged, dig over the beds adding well-rotted manure or compost particularly the area for planting next year's beans and peas.

Harvest the last of your root vegetables and store in a cool dark place. Parsnips can stay in the ground but protect from frost.

Weed and mulch around fruit trees, bushes and cane fruit. Apple and pear trees are now dormant so can be pruned taking out dead, diseased and damaged branches or to reduce the height cut no more than one third of top growth to the desired shape. Winter prune gooseberries and thin established currant bushes, cut out about one third of old wood from blackcurrants.

Incidentally, how are your brassicas? I always ask because I know that one reader has a brassica fetish. If you have grown kale, especially one of the black varieties such as Cavolo Tuscan, tough enough to survive most winters therefore can be cropped through the winter if you're lucky.

## **The Flower Garden**

Remove fallen leaves and hopefully remove slugs at the same time. Tender plants need a bit of help through the winter months so mulch. Dahlias are usually dug up and protected under cover but in this part of the country you could try leaving in the ground and mulching with compost or straw.

## **The Water Garden**

Unless unseasonably warm, pond fish shouldn't need feeding until the spring starts to warm the water again.

Aim of an area in the pond that can remain free of ice, use the trusty tennis ball or a plank of wood across one corner. Check anywhere in the garden where water can accumulate and then freeze. Frogs are particularly vulnerable if they find shallow water to hibernate, if it freezes it will kill them.

## **Lawns**

With the last winter cut done and mower cleaned and stored for its winter holiday, lawn care should include raking up fallen leaves, aerating the areas that puddle with water and keeping people and pets off as much as you can.

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

Merry Christmas and Keep gardening.

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