

Gardening tips for February

February can be a month of extremes, if the weather is good enough, get out and potter, if not plan ahead. Visit the garden centre for your choice of veg and flower seed packets. Whatever the conditions, there is a limit to how much you can usefully do on the allotment and it is worth keeping off the lawn and flower borders if too boggy. However, if you are desperate to get gardening here are a few suggestions.

The veg patch

Remember that plan you made of your veg patch last year so that you could remember what you planted and where, now it the time to find it and plan for this year therefore you are now starting your crop rotation just like a true pro.

If the soil is good enough to be worked, easily tested by standing on it. If you and your wellies can walk away together it is worth digging over, if your wellies are held hostage go back another day and try again. This is the time to dig in compost or well-rotted manure if you get chance.

Veg seeds to plant now include parsnips, broad beans, salad onions, onions/shallots (probably best planted as bulbs). Veg to plant under cover include sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, early peas.

Buy seed potatoes and start chitting the early varieties. Do this by placing the potatoes into egg boxes or seed trays and leave somewhere in the light to sprout shoots called chits. These should be ready for planting next month.

Tomatoes

After last year's disaster with tomatoes (blight on outdoor grown) does anyone want to try again? If you planted in pots and will be using the same pots again, make sure you give them a thorough clean and always use fresh compost. I'm hoping for a better summer but just in case I'm growing a blight resistant variety called Crimson Crush, I'll let you know later in the year if I was successful!

The flower garden

You may have noticed that the only group of plants that appreciate a good winter and like to stretch themselves as wide as possible are weeds. February is the time to dig them up, once clear of weeds you can mulch the borders making them look great and knowing that your hard work may be appreciated.

Prune winter flowering shrubs such as winter jasmine and heathers and Mahonia when finished flowering. Prune summer flowering deciduous shrubs such as Cotinus, berberis, flowering current and buddleia. Remove old leaves from Hellebores to expose the flowers, now you can see them! Wisteria should be pruned twice a year. Having cut back new growth to 6 leaves last autumn, cut again to 2 buds, this will encourage flowering.

Trees

This is the year of the Queen's Green Canopy, usually referred to as "Plant a tree for the jubilee". EGRGA would like to encourage everyone to plant a tree in their garden. More information will be provided in future issues but to get started visit www.royal.uk/queens-green-canopy. I suggest the planting of smaller ornamental garden trees rather than woodland species because most of us don't really have the space for full grown oaks or horse chestnuts!

Ponds

If you don't have a pond, now is a good time to think about digging a hole for one. Think about safety first; children, pets yourself after a few gins etc. For water clarity the deeper the better but a minimum of 60 to 80cm and have at least one gently sloping edge to make it wildlife-friendly and help to make marginal plantings appear natural.

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

Keep gardening.

Richard Haigh, Chairman EGRGA