

Gardening tips for March

When it's Spring again I'll bring again, Tulips from Amsterdam... I'm no Max Bygraves but have you ever wondered where all the plants come from that are available in garden centres, supermarkets and DIY stores? If you are concerned about buying British have a look at plant labels. British growers do exist but you can be forgiven for thinking otherwise as most plants as well as Max's tulips seem to come from the Netherlands these days.

So, spare a thought for our home-grown growers and try to buy British; you know - "every little helps".

And now to the garden, it is March, perfect growing weather, *sow* get planting. As you rush off to buy your stock of British veg and flower seeds have you considered planting specifically to enter any of the competition classes at the EGRGA Spring, Summer or Autumn Shows? This could be a good way to focus the mind on what you will be planting in the garden this year. To help inspire you, go to www.gardening.org to find our online handbook which list all the various classes.

Before you get started, what are you going to do about slugs and snails? They account for a large proportion of damage to plants so how best to control them?



Top of the list must be beer traps. They are effective and cost less than you think because slugs like watered down cheap lager! If you try this control, leave the edge of your trap about 20 mm above ground level, this helps to ensure you are trapping slugs and snails and not less harmful inhabitants of your garden. When the stink of dead slugs and rotten larger gets too much, empty the trap and start again.

For a high-tech approach, use nematodes. Slug nematodes are microscopic, transparent worms, which feed and multiply inside the slug and kill it. Easy to apply (by watering can) and completely safe to use wrt children, pets and wildlife, making it the perfect solution for organic gardening. This type of control is favoured by professional growers which is why garden centre plants always look perfect (they bin all tatty ones!)

And lastly, slug pellets, the old-fashioned metaldehyde pellets are now banned due to an unacceptable risk to birds and small mammals. Their replacement, ferric phosphate now look the same (coloured blue) and are supposed to be

just as effective. Regarding the banned metaldehyde versions, not only is it illegal to buy them but also to use them, so any old stock should be destroyed, in other words, taken to the council recycling centre.

The kitchen garden

Plant shallots, onion sets and early potatoes. Ensure you chit potatoes before planting. Sow courgettes, leeks, peas, beetroot and cucumbers under cover. Sow broad beans direct outside. Plant up pots of mint, tarragon, thyme and rosemary, this is particularly rewarding if you have a small garden, patio or balcony and slugs don't like them!

The flower garden

Top-dress pots. Revitalise permanently planted pots by scraping out the top layer of old compost to a depth of about 5 cm and adding the same amount of fresh compost and fork it into the old compost surface.

Prune bush and climbing roses. A good rule worth repeating from last year regarding roses is to prune after flowering or hip formation, this way you can be certain you haven't pruned off more than necessary.

Cut back Cornus (dogwood) and Salix (willow) for colourful winter stems.

Plant summer flowering corms or bulbs in pots using a free draining soil/compost. If you choose Dahlias, please consider entering the EGRGA Autumn Show.

Lawns

Following the winter rain, lawns are probably still too boggy to think about. What a contrast to last year where the lawn mower had already seen daylight as early as January. Perhaps this year, National First Mow of the Year Day really will be Mothering Sunday! Whenever you decide to start mowing, remember to take it easy at first with a high cut and reduce the height of cut over the coming weeks, but don't go for the cricket pitch wicket look, try to leave some greenery, a minimum 25 mm should be short enough.

Ornamental grasses are not lawns but they are grasses, so if you have any you can give them the chop, they will grow back.

For previous editions of gardening tips, membership details and to ask garden related questions please go to www.gardenreg.org.

Keep gardening.

Richard Haigh EGRGA Chairman