

Gardening tips for March

If the soil is warming up it is time to get planting. When buying seeds or plants, always read the growing or planting instructions.

Compost Corner

Different compost is needed at this time of year, garden centres have all sorts to tempt you to spend your well-earned pension. If you buy general compost, topsoil and coarse sand you should be able to mix what you need. For sowing seeds, mix 50% soil with 25% coarse sand and 25% compost. For planting cuttings, use 50% sharp sand and 50% compost and for planting trees, shrubs and fruit use 30% compost with 70% soil; if you are planting trees reuse any compost from pots etc used last year, this can be a big saving.

The veg patch

It's chitting time again! If planting potatoes encourage them to sprout by placing in a tray so that the end of the potatoes with the most eyes or shoots are uppermost. Keep the tray frost free in a light place, plant out (the potatoes not the tray) by the end of April.

Brassicas Special

~~I'm often asked, sometimes asked~~ someone once asked me about growing brassicas (the leafy types rather than root crop), so, sow Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cabbage indoors. If warm enough you can try sowing directly outside but you will need weather protection. All brassica crops grow best in partial shade, in firm, fertile, free-draining soil. Dig over your soil as deeply as you can removing any stones and work in plenty of well-rotted manure or compost. Rake in a general-purpose fertilizer such as blood, fish and bone, tread on the soil (heel and toe) to remove any air pockets and make the surface very firm to stop wind rock; brassicas are heavy plants.

Tomatoes

Time to plant tomato seeds, February is often regarded as the start of the tomato growing season, however, delaying to March means less time indoors therefore stronger less straggly plants. Sow indoors in a light position and keep at 21C to germinate ready for planting out in May.

The flower garden

Roses benefit from an annual pruning; you should achieve better flowering and a longer-lived plant. There are however exceptions. Early flowering rambler roses that can flower from late March and throughout April should be pruned

after flowering. As a rule of thumb, any rose can be pruned after flowering or hip formation (I like well-formed hips) this way you can be certain you haven't pruned off more than necessary. If you're feeling a little bolder, prune to a bud plus 5 mm. If the rose is a bush or shrub, cut to an outward facing bud to encourage an open centre to the plant. Prune out dead, diseased, crossed, crowded or weak stems. If you have a rose hedge and all this sounds a bit of a faff, use the hedge trimmer but trim before the birds start nesting.

Lift and divide overgrown clumps of perennials. Top dress containers with fresh compost and mulch for the aesthetic! Cut back dogwoods and willow. Hoe and mulch weeds to keep under control. Sow sweet peas outside and as they grow watch the sparrows eat them!

Plant summer flowering bulbs in pots using a free draining soil/compost or use the tree mix described above. These pots can be rotated with the spring bulb pots to help ensure colour and interest all year round.

Lawns

Hands up, who was mowing their lawn in January? It was dry enough so it did tempt a few to see if the mower was still working. For those of us who have waited for the National First Mow of the Year Day aka Mothering Sunday, check to see if the ground is firm and dry enough to go in for the first cut, but be gentle, set the cutting height to the highest settings and give the grass a light trim. Over the next few weeks shorten the cut to your preference, try to avoid a number 1, your grass will love you for it.

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Keep gardening.

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