

Gardening tips for February

February is ice and sleet, freeze the toes right off your feet

So, stay indoors then! Indoors perhaps, however, there is a lot of preparation to be done this month. If you are new to gardening consider buying seeds rather than plants, it makes the money go further and there is a sense of achievement when seeds germinate. Seed packets usually contain growing instructions. Plan where to plant, groups of several plants can make a better display than single plants filling gaps in the border. If planting the veg patch make a plan of what and where you have planted and keep for next year, this will help with future crop rotation.

The veg patch

If the ground is not frozen or too wet, complete winter digging over. Incorporate manure/compost if not done last month. Either dig it in or leave on the surface to let the worms do the job for you.

The following can be sown now, broad beans if ground not frozen or indoors if too cold outside, lettuce indoors and plant out next month to get an early crop in May. Sow early varieties of Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cabbage indoors for later planting out. Sow early varieties of turnips outside but under cover.

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

Tomato seeds can be planted now if you have a heated greenhouse, Sow indoors and keep at 21C to germinate. If growing tomatoes outside or in an unheated greenhouse leave until next month.

The flower garden

Garden centres will be stuffed with flowering plants but make sure they are hardy or can you cover them on frosty nights.

Prune winter flowering shrubs such as winter jasmine and heathers when finished flowering.

Start to wake up dahlias if stored dry over winter. Plant up, water and keep in the greenhouse.

Prune summer flowering deciduous shrubs such as Cotinus, berberis, flowering current and buddleia.

Wisteria should be pruned twice a year. Having cut back new growth to 6 leaves last autumn, cut again to 2 leaves, this will encourage buds to flower.

Trim back ivy, Virginia creeper and other climbers if they have outgrown their space and before birds start nesting.

Hedges

Trimming hedges requires a bit of planning depending on the type of hedge and very importantly avoid when birds are nesting between March and late summer.

This month give evergreen hedges a light cut before the spring growth but don't cut into mature wood unless you want a bald patch.

If you are thinking about planting a hedge consider planting native plant species as these make an attractive, natural and wildlife friendly hedge. Have you ever seen birds in a laurel hedge? If you have, were they enjoying themselves?

Birds

Keep feeding and provide water birds (every month). Different foods attract different species – try sunflower hearts, peanuts, mealworms and suet pellets. Throw a handful of mixed bird food on the ground for ground feeding species but try to keep the ground reasonable clear otherwise this can attract rodents.

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

Keep gardening.

Richard Haigh EGRGA Chairman