

Gardening tips for March

**If you want to know when to sow,
take your trousers off and sit on the ground!**

I know it does not scan; sitting in the snow would clearly be too cold to plant anything. Perhaps knowing your derriere from your elbow could help as testing the temperature of the ground with your elbow may be less disconcerting? You could always use a thermometer (ideally a soil temperature of at least 7C) or even easier, have the weeds started looking like something from the Little Shop of Horrors? If so, it could be time to sow. A bit of stanza after all!

Armed with your seed purchases review the planting instructions and get the March ones planted. If your elbow thinks it is too cold, then plant indoors for later planting out. Keep an eye on the seed packets, as the weeks go by it is easy to overlook the planting dates particularly as we get further into the growing season.

The veg patch

A few words about seed potatoes. There are dozens of different varieties each with their own USP. I always go for ones that say “good disease resistance” or resistant to scab and/or blight and hope for the best. As with all seeds, follow the instructions provided on the packet and follow the chitting process described in last month’s article.

Varieties are normally grouped into 3 types according to when to plant and when to harvest,

First and second earlies. Called new potatoes when buying them in the supermarket. Plant this month but give the shoots frost protection by carefully piling soil on top, commonly called earthing up which also increases the yield of potatoes. First earlies will take about 12 weeks to mature, harvest starting in June. Second earlies about 16 weeks therefore harvest starting in July.

Main crop. These take longer to grow, about 20 weeks, plant in April, harvest from July through to Autumn. Main crop potatoes are for general use.

Veg seeds to plant indoors include cabbage, calabrese/broccoli, leeks, peas, spinach and spring onions.

Seeds that can be sown directly outdoors include beetroot, carrots, lettuce, radishes, rocket, turnips and parsnips.

Tomatoes

Time to plant tomato seeds, sow indoors in a light position and keep at 21C to germinate ready for planting out in May.

The flower garden

If you have a new garden or wanting to make changes draw up a plan of the beds with any existing shrubs and plan where new perennials will be going.

By now the snow drops will be over their best and it is a good time while they are still in leaf to divide large clumps and relocate around the garden.

Divide perennials such as geranium, daylily, Hosta and Iris to improve flowering.

Plants in containers may need potting on to the next size pot, if not give the potted plant a treat and top dress with fresh compost.

Prune roses to 5mm above a bud sloping away from the bud to discourage water. If you prune to an outward facing bud the rose will bush out with an open centre, prune to an inward facing but will encourage more upright growth, perhaps do a bit of both.

Prune Cornus (dogwood) late March, this coppicing will encourage new stems for next winter colour.

Sweet peas can be sown outside.

Lawns

Yes, I know it is only March, but it can be dry enough and the turf firm enough to give the grass its first cut. Set the cutting height on your mower to one of the highest settings and give the grass a light trim. If it still looks like the next ice age has just started, stay indoors with a cup of tea!

Hedges

As birds start looking for nesting sites it is time to leave the hedges alone until late summer/autumn.

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

Keep gardening.

Richard Haigh EGRGA Chairman