

The Gala Garden

March was the beginning of the year in Medieval days and that's easy to relate to this time around. We'll be glad to see the back of a winter that's had us wondering what could survive and when it might be safe to plant again. Established plants are remarkably resilient though and what a relief to see buds about to break leaf and life returning to the garden.

This month we can mulch bare soil in beds and borders, especially around newly planted trees, shrubs or perennials to suppress weeds and retain moisture when (hopefully!) the weather dries up. Split polyanthus after flowering and plant summer-flowering bulbs. Move evergreen shrubs and lift & divide overgrown clumps of perennials to renew their vigour. This is a good time to plant climbers and to prune roses & hardy fruit trees. It's tempting to go ahead and plant lots now to make the most of our growing season but be guided by nature and hold back for a week or two if heat & light levels need to rise enough for young plants to thrive. Old growth left over winter can now be tidied and, generally keep a look out for slugs which average at an unbelievable 200 per sq metre, each with the potential to produce around 90,000 grandchildren, though fortunately they won't all cause devastation! To deter them from newly planted specimens, try boiling two crushed garlic cloves in a litre of water for 3-4 mins then add one tbsp to 4 litres of water in a watering can, wetting the plant's leaves late on a dry day (and remembering to repeat if it rains)...

On the side of beneficial insects, the more we plant with bees and butterflies in mind, the better. Herbs such as lavender, pot marigold, oregano, thyme & sage are invaluable and can be grown even in small spaces or pots. Bees need food from early in the year so would appreciate the early flowering pulmonaria, aubretia, crocus or primrose at this time.

For our own food, we can plant early potatoes and onion sets this month and prepare the ground for strawberries. All of these can be container grown, as can figs which actually do better when their roots are confined, though you'll need to keep up with the watering. Red, white or blackcurrants, gooseberries & rhubarb are also easy to grow and can bear fruit at different stages of the season, depending on the variety. They will require netting at that time unless you want to donate your berries to the birds! Raspberry canes should now be cut back to 6" and new canes can be planted until the end of their dormancy later this month. If you want to get going with salad crops, it's worth warming the soil with fleece for sowing and planting outdoors productively in April. Meantime, you can sow lettuce, peas and leeks indoors if you want to get growing. - You're welcome to visit us between 10 and 5 any day of the week to see a whole range of plants, including hydroponically grown vegetables. Let's hope we're in for a lovely spring and summer!

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