

WHAT TO DO IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH: MARCH

March brings the first real signs of spring with days getting longer and the sun getting warmer. Many spring flowers including daffodils, early tulips, dwarf iris and crown imperials will burst into flower bringing colour and fragrance into your garden. This is the month for sowing tender plants, pruning shrubs and roses, dividing perennials and just being out and about in the fresh spring air – there is much work to be done!

TASK LIST

- Plant summer-flowering bulbs and tubers such as gladioli, begonias, lilies, dahlias and tall irises in a warm greenhouse to give them a good start. Put them into pots which can then be moved outside in a couple of months when all danger of frost has gone.

- Spring bulbs will be growing well and will establish themselves if planted deeply enough. They will benefit from a good feed in this active growing period which will bulk up next year's growth. If you have large clumps of daffodils that are not flowering well, mark them now with a stick and divide the clumps when the leaves die back and replant in smaller numbers to encourage flowering next year. Lift and divide large clumps of snowdrops after flowering but whilst still in leaf. Remember to dead-head flowers that have faded as this will also conserve energy for next year.

- March is a good month for pruning – remove any dead wood from plants that have flowered through the winter, such as viburnums, mahonia, winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*) and winter sweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*). Remove some growth from dogwoods (*Cornus*), willows (*Salix*), hardy fuchsias and *Ceratostigma* to encourage fresh, brightly coloured new growth. Remove any dead, diseased or damaged stems from roses and, in general, prune all main rose growth to within four or five buds from the base, and to within two or three buds of side growth.

- To increase stock and promote flowering, split and divide herbaceous perennials, replanting only the most vigorous, healthy portions into refreshed soil. Mulching the soil around plants and trees with well decomposed manure or old garden compost will help prevent weeds from appearing and also insulate the soil and help retain moisture.

- Planting from seed should now be well under way in the greenhouse to raise summer bedding plants and tender vegetable crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and aubergines. Crops that can be sown outside include beetroot, broad beans, leeks, lettuce, radishes, summer cabbage, hardy peas and Brussel sprouts. These outdoor crops will benefit if you can give them some protection by use of a cold frame or cloches. Now is also the time to plant your first early potatoes which have been chitted and are showing shoots, and shallots and onion sets may also be planted.



- In mild weather, watch out for pests such as greenfly, blackfly, slugs and snails. Young, fresh growth on plants offers these predators a cosy home and a tasty meal. If you take appropriate action before they colonise a plant then it will help the plant to become established and therefore more resilient to pests and diseases.

- Pot on houseplants and ferns into slightly larger pots and take the opportunity to clean the larger-leaved plants such as Swiss cheese plants, ornamental figs and rubber plants. Wash the leaves gently with a proprietary leaf-shine or with a mixture of milk and water to remove any dust or grime. Start to increase their watering and give them a boost with the first feed of the year.

OUR PLANTS OF THE MONTH

The garden is bursting with new colour and interest this month – the list is endless! Spring flowering bulbs are beginning to show their blousy colours but also look down at ground level and catch the more muted anemone blanda, crocus, primulas, violas, erythronium and grape hyacinths (*Muscari*). Trees and shrubs include maples (*Acer*), magnolias, ornamental cherries (*Prunus*), rhododendrons and azaleas, willows (*Salix*), camellias, Japanese quince (*Chaenomeles*), daphne, forsythia, hazels (*Corylus*), berberis, *Clematis armandii* and piers.

DIANA'S CHOICE

The obvious choice this month is the daffodil – they are everywhere you look and provide a splash of sunshine on dull days. Daffodils are easy to grow and require little maintenance. They come in many different shapes and colours that, with careful selection of varieties, can bloom for four months a year. The scientific name of the daffodil derives from the Greek god Narcissus, who looked into a pool, saw his reflection and fell in love with himself. Hybrid daffodils, the ones most commonly planted, will grow almost anywhere, although they do prefer well-drained soils in a sunny or lightly shaded spot in the garden.

