



BLACKWOOD'S

MARCH IN THE GARDEN

The weather can still be relatively warm and balmy during March. Day length decreases and growth starts to slow down. It's important to be patient and wait until temperatures start to drop, especially during the night time, before even considering planting the first autumn and winter vegetables and flowers. March is the beginning of the all-important autumn planting season, but needs to be used for preparation and planning rather than the actual doing. The work load carried out in the autumn defines the garden for the rest of the year, including the next spring.

FLOWERS

- In preparation for autumn planting, it's time to get the soil ready. Dig in compost and superphosphate or bone meal at the recommended application rates.
- March is an important month for sowing flower seeds of many well-known winter and spring flowers. Alyssum, sweet peas, African daisies, Bokbaaivygies and Virginian stocks are some of the most important. All of these seeds should be sown in situ, directly into the garden, rather than in seed trays.
- In colder areas, plant out early seedlings of stocks, calendulas and snapdragons.
- Most summer flowering annuals will now need to be pulled out and added to the compost heap.
- Dead head flowers that are still performing well.
- Continue feeding plants that are growing and performing despite the changing of the seasons.

VEGETABLES

- Many vegetable seeds can be planted now. Peas, broad beans, carrots, parsnips, turnips and radish all grow exceptionally well during the cooler season.
- Harvest the last of the summer season crops like pumpkins and squashes.
- Plant out seedlings of cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, lettuce, spinach. Stagger plantings at 3 to 4 week intervals to ensure continuity of supply.
- Most vegetables need to grow in full day sunshine.

HERBS

- As the climate cools down, most herbs grow with renewed vigour. Replace any plants that have died from summer stress.
- Sow seeds of parsley, mustard and rocket, coriander and basil in sub-tropical areas.
- Summer herbs like basil and coriander will start to go off.
- Harvest the crop and process into pesto for the winter season.
- It's a good time to tidy up the whole herb garden.
- Water well during dry periods.

FRUIT

- Very early citrus crops will start ripening now.
- Check citrus trees for red scale on leaves and stems.
- Gather nuts that are continuously falling from the trees.
- Late crops of apples and pears will need harvesting and storing.

ORNAMENTALS

- Spring flowering bulbs like freesias and ranunculus hit the market this month. Buy them early and store them in the vegetable compartment of the refrigerator. Only plant them out when the weather cools down in 4 to 6 week's time. Do not plant them too early, as they may abort their embryo flower buds due to the heat.
- Plant up pots, containers and hanging baskets that have come to the end of their summer season.
- Lift and divide perennials that have started to go dormant.
- Take cuttings of soft wooded plants like lavenders and fuchsias.
- Tidy up the dead leaves on hellebores and mulch with layer of leaf mould. This ensures a good winter display.

ROSES

- Fertilise roses for the last time before winter in the colder climates. Carry on feeding in warmer regions until May.
- Continue to spray regularly against fungal infection, insects and bollworm.
- Dead head spent flowers.
- Roses generally have a spectacular autumn flush from March to April.
- Water deeply twice a week as rainfall generally reduces around now.

LAWNS

- Raise the height of mower blades as winter approaches and growth slows down.
- Rake fallen leaves from the grass to prevent fungal diseases. Use a soft plastic or rubber lawn rake.
- Sow seeds for new lawn grass, especially in colder areas where Shade Over and All Seasons Evergreen grow well.
- Feed with a balanced garden fertiliser like 2:3:2 to encourage root growth before winter.
- Lawn caterpillar (army worm) can still be a problem now.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE

- Start raking up falling autumn leaves and adding them to the compost heap. They are invaluable once they have broken down into compost.
- Protect pools from autumn leaves with a net if necessary.
- Try and catch up with weeding as growth rates decrease.
- Spray weeds in paving and driveways as well as underneath electric fences.
- Clean out gutters and drains to prevent fallen leaves from blocking them during the autumn rains.

Autumn is a second spring, when every leaf is a flower.