

WHAT TO DO IN THE GARDEN IN FEBRUARY

Don't forget the Horticultural Society's Autumn Flower Show

3 and 4 March 2018

In the Lancaster Hall, Wesley Centre, Forrest

THE ORNAMENTAL GARDEN

- Water roses well and apply a foliage fertiliser in late February to encourage autumn growth.
- Prune spring-flowering heritage roses by thinning and shortening excess growth. With old plants, remove some of the older wood back to ground level.
- Powdery mildew can be a problem for many plants at this time of the year. Heritage roses often fall victim, but pruning off diseased growth after flowering is an easy solution. For other plants, spraying may be necessary. EcoFungus, Yates Rose Shield or Rose Gun Advanced are all helpful.
- Obtain or order new spring-flowering bulbs from local suppliers or interstate specialist growers ready for planting during autumn. Wait until cooler weather before planting, storing bulbs in a cool dark airy place in the interim.
- Established spring bulbs may still be lifted if they flowered poorly, or if they have been in the garden for three years or more. Poor flowering may be due to overcrowding or overhanging shrubs reducing their hours of sunlight. Replant in a sunny position in enriched soil.
- Tulips and Dutch irises should be lifted each year and stored in a dry cool place.
- Deadhead rhododendrons, camellias and azaleas, apply organic mulch, fertilise lightly and keep damp. If foliage of rhododendrons and azaleas looks dull and silvery, check for lace bug or two-spotted mite infestation under leaves, and apply remedy.
- Keep tying dahlias and tall chrysanthemums. A little disbudding will improve flower and stem quality.
- If growing tuberous begonias, disbud now, leaving only the centre male flower on each flowering stem. Moisten but don't overwater.
- Seeds of frost-hardy annuals and perennials can still be sown, and seedlings, even if small, are best transplanted in April so as to establish before winter.
- Continue to deadhead annuals, roses and dahlias as flowers pass their peak, to help extend the flowering season. Liquid fertiliser will help. Trim spent agapanthus heads.

Cut back dianthus and remove spindly shoots to keep the plant stocky. Replant after two years.

- Hydrangea heads may be trimmed or left to age. This process is called antiquing, and can be a great attraction as the flower heads age to rich greens, reds and purples. If leaves show sign of mildew, these can be removed with pruning and binned rather than added to the compost heap.
- Remove rampant wisteria canes.

GARDEN MAINTENANCE

- As February is generally the hottest month, it's wise to check all areas of the garden, particularly new plantings, for areas of dryness, even after rain, especially under eaves and tree canopies.
- Use water sparingly, and waste water from the household will keep your plants growing. In times of drought, focus available water on trees and shrubs, as smaller plants can be replaced and lawns revived when the rains come.
- Trees and shrubs planted in autumn or winter may still be establishing a good root system, so make sure they don't dry out.
- Weeds compete with your precious plants for space and nutrients, so remove them before they produce seed. They also play host to many plant diseases and pests, and their seeds will give you work for many years to come. Don't leave pulled weeds lying in the garden as mulch, for they often continue to mature and produce seed even after being pulled.
- Look out for ant activity on the stems of fruit trees or ornamentals, as ants are attracted to honeydew, a sugary substance excreted by scale or aphids.
- Watch for pests and disease, and treat scale and aphids with horticultural oil. As ants spread the scale, they will also need to be controlled. Caterpillars can be controlled with Dipel® or Success®.
- Take semi-hardwood cuttings, using either hormone gel or powder, or unrefined honey to strike them. Gently group them in a pot filled with propagation sand, and keep them moist in a protected area. Cuttings should not be allowed to dry out, so this task is best done after good rains, or early or late in the day. If there is any delay in planting, cuttings are best carried in a plastic bag with a little moisture and sealed to keep them turgid, or placed directly into water.

THE KITCHEN GARDEN

- Sow seeds of Asian greens, Chinese cabbage, radish, spinach and turnip. A late sowing of beans may be made early in the month in the warmest protected area.
- Plant seedlings of brassicas, lettuce and English spinach.

- Vegetables should be producing good quality crops, but remember to keep the water up to tomatoes, capsicum and egg plants.
- Liquid fertiliser solution may be applied to vegetables.
- Remove plants as they finish their growth cycle so as to maintain good hygiene and to make room for winter crops.
- Dig over the vegetable garden ready for more planting, or consider planting a green manure crop.
- Protect apples, crab apples, pears and quinces from birds.
- Remove excess growth from apples and pears.
- Gather ripening seed if you wish to propagate your own seedlings. Seed will usually be ripe when it begins to turn brown. Store in paper bags and label with plant name and date. Warning: if using seed from hybrid plants, the resulting seedlings may not be as good as the parent plant.
- Trim lavender and rosemary hedges. If lavender and rosemary are starting to become woody, prepare some cuttings from any remaining vigorous growth for eventual replacement of the original plants.
- Feed citrus with a citrus fertiliser or a full-strength foliage fertiliser and keep well-watered as fruit begins to mature.
