

# What to do in the garden in May

## The Ornamental Garden

- If you still have some hydrangea heads left in your garden, look for those that have aged well to provide beautiful colour. Along with autumn leaves and nerines, these can provide a wonderful source of colour for vases.
- It's a good time to move evergreen shrubs, repot shrubs and add any new plants to your garden.
- Deciduous plants are available now, and if you are keen to add some colour, choose while plants are still in leaf so that you get the plant with the most vibrant colour.
- Packaged roses often appear at some outlets now. Choose those that are healthy but still dormant. This is one time where you should not be tempted to buy any that are shooting. Those new shoots will be burned off once they experience a Canberra winter.
- Spring-flowering camellias will benefit from some disbudding, as this will improve the size of the flowers.
- Tulips and Dutch iris can be planted now. Irises already growing can be given a light dressing of lime.
- Remove begonia tubers from pots when the stems fall off. They can be stored over winter in a shallow tray of potting mix, covered with a plastic bag and placed in a dry dark area.
- As spring-flowering annuals begin growing, pinch them back to strengthen them and to encourage root growth. Half-strength foliage fertiliser may be applied.
- Cut old leaves from hellebores and apply a complete fertiliser as well as dolomite lime. They can also be moved at this time if you wish.

## The Kitchen Garden

- Monitor vegetable crops for pests, weeds and adequate moisture.
- It's time for a complete clean-up after harvesting.
- Undertake final sowing of seed of late-maturing onions. Prepare area for planting onion seedlings in late winter. Sow seeds of peas until mid-May.
- Garlic can be sown from now on until early spring.
- Consider some new fruit trees and berries. Most fruit-bearing plants require continuing maintenance, but it will be worth it. Some fruit trees are less work than others and are worth a place in the general landscape for their shape, leaf and fruit colour e.g. persimmon or olives, but please do your research before buying.
- Some fruit trees will require cross-pollination with another cultivar, so check this aspect with the horticulturist at your garden centre before purchasing.
- Nowadays many fruit trees are grafted onto dwarfing rootstocks and so are far more suited for smaller gardens or for pot culture.
- Birds and other animals can be a nuisance. Foil gift-wrapping tape can be hung from poles and fruit can be bagged or trees netted.

- If bird or insect-exclusion netting is used, remember to peg it down well at ground level to ensure birds aren't trapped within.
- If you choose to plant fruit trees, they will benefit from good soil preparation to improve the texture and increase fertility with compost and well-rotted manure. Raised beds will improve the drainage in clay soils.
- Plant fresh strawberries now. If your strawberries have been in the garden for more than 3 years, it's time to buy some fresh, new, virus-free stock.

## **General Maintenance**

- The end of autumn normally brings wonderful clear days with cold nights and cool mornings. Working in the garden is a delight on most days.
- Water only as required. Water early as overnight frosts will freeze the water left on plants and may cause damage. Keep newly-planted lawn areas moist.
- Manual timers may need to be removed from taps at night in areas exposed to frost, to avoid damage from freezing. Cover any exposed piping for the same reason.
- It's time for a general tidy-up of the garden, but don't burn your leaves. Collect the last of your fallen leaves and add to the compost heap or mix with lawn clippings and other material for mulch.
- Frost-tender potted plants may need relocating to a warmer, sheltered site or, alternatively, place the pot into a larger pot and place straw in the space between for insulation. This will only protect the roots. Frost-protection cloth is another option, and Yates Stress Guard (a polymer spray) will provide a few degrees of protection to valued plants.
- Hedge maintenance may be done.
- It's a good time to check deciduous trees and remove any dead wood or unwanted lower branches.
- There is always weeding to be done, but as well, remember to check your garden and fenceline to see whether there are any unwanted seedlings. Birds can often deposit seeds of woody weeds e.g. privet. It's best to remove or spray seedlings while they are small. If you leave them for too long, they can quickly become a major problem, especially if growing in tight spaces between fences and buildings.