



by Vanda Lawrence

# THE AMATEUR GARDENER



Forsythia © Wikimedia Commons/RDSmith

**H**ello again, fellow gardeners. At last, longer days and warmer temperatures - deep joy! Now we can be in the garden because we want to, not because we must, in order to fit in all the jobs. And let's face it, there are plenty of those!

This is the month for weeding, fertilising and mulching to keep the weeds at bay. If it's not possible or practical to mulch then make a point of hoeing on dry days so that the hoed weeds will dry off and die quickly. At the same time you will be breaking up and aerating the soil, as well as destroying new sprouting weed seeds which are not yet even noticeable in the soil. If you can do this every couple of days you will save yourself lots of back-breaking weeding and the garden will look "bloomin' lovely"!

Daffodils and Narcissi are coming to the end of their flowering season so dead-head and give them a liquid feed or sprinkling of bone-meal as they die down. Don't cut off the leaves as the goodness from these is needed to replenish the bulbs for next year. Tulips will be flowering next so treat them in the same way to ensure more lovely blooms next year.

Forsythia and other flowering shrubs can be pruned after flowering, and if you need to move any evergreen shrubs do it now, as long as your soil is not waterlogged. Take the largest possible rootball when tackling this task - sometimes very difficult but well worth the effort.



Rose beds need weeding and then mulching to retain moisture and deter new weeds. Tie in new growth on climbers and rambles - laying the stems as horizontally as possible encourages heavy flowering.

If you are planning new flower beds or shrub borders please include bee and insect friendly plants and grasses which, as well as providing pollen and nectar during the warm, sunny days, will provide shelter for overwintering insects during the cold, wet months. Now is the time to think of these things.

Lawns need regular attention now. Mow, scarify to aerate then apply a high nitrogen spring lawn fertiliser to encourage strong growth. If there are mossy patches use a combined fertiliser and moss-killer after scarifying. April is also the month for applying a



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general lawn weed killer. Any bare or worn patches can be re-seeded now and this month is also ideal for sowing new lawns, although if your soil is still wet and cold germination will be poor so it's better to delay for a couple of weeks.

Slugs will be busy again now. Use crushed eggshells around plants to deter these pests. A liquid slug killer will eliminate slugs below the soil surface and you can protect pot plants by smearing a mix of salt and Vaseline around the outside rims of the pots. Apparently there is a Spanish 'super slug' which is gradually spreading through Europe. They can survive the winter in the garden as eggs and become active at +5 degs. They grow up to 15 cm long and one slug can lay up to 400 eggs!

Be vigilant in the potager too, you don't want to lose your vegetable seedlings and plants at this stage. Keep your eyes peeled when you are earthing up your potatoes and hoeing to keep the weeds down amongst young vegetables.

In the fruit garden it's the same thing - weed, feed with slow-release fertiliser and mulch, especially in the strawberry bed. Straw makes a good mulch here.

Lastly, back outside the birds are busy building their nests in readiness for laying their eggs so please continue to put out food for them and keep the bird bath topped up so they can get a drink. It won't be long before we see baby birds in the garden - I love watching them, don't you?



*Starlings in the bird bath © Wikimedia Commons/Snowmanradio*

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