



THE AMATEUR GARDENER

by Vanda Lawrence



For me there is not much time for any big outside jobs at the moment but I am hoping to sort out the raspberry canes this month. I planted different varieties too closely together – my first mistake; the second mistake was that I didn't keep up with cutting down the fruited canes and tying in the new. So now new canes are springing up in amongst canes which have already borne fruit and I am not sure which are which. Grrrr!! Learn by my mistake, mes amis and keep different varieties very well separated. I am going to have to live with my mistake for the moment and just cut them all down, hoping to make sense of it all next year. I must say though, if you are thinking of buying any raspberry canes, I would whole-heartedly recommend yellow raspberries – they are delicious.

As for the canes that I cut down, I'm going to stack them in a quiet, sheltered corner of the garden and hope a hedgehog will find it a comfortable place to overwinter, then next year he might like to stay and eat up the slugs to save me using slug pellets. One good turn deserves another, wouldn't you say? Somebody did remind me recently though, that the fencing we have put around the garden to keep the dogs enclosed will actually keep hedgehogs out, so we need to make a couple of little tunnels in the boundary fence so our prickly friends can gain access.



The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown



Now it's time to finish for this month – and this year - so I'll do my usual and remind you to have some salt and/or sharp sand handy so that you are ready to deal with icy paths and driveways. And, of course, feed the birds and keep their water bowls free from ice.

I wish you all good health and much happiness for Christmas and the New Year 2016.

Joyeux Noël tout le monde



Photos: Pixiabay.com

Yes, it's that time again, so let's get decorating! Make a Christmas wreath for the front door using an old wire coat hanger pulled into a circular shape, holly twigs, pieces of conifer, variegated ivy, pine cones, berries. Attach any or all of these to the wire frame with florist's wire, raffia or sparkly ribbon, spray with glitter or artificial snow and finish off with small baubles if required. The children will love to have a go at that, or alternatively, if you have holly in your garden just cut some sprigs, tie together with red ribbon and hang on the front door. Get the children to brush the leaves with glue and sprinkle with glitter for extra sparkle.

Mistletoe is also very 'christmassy' with the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe. Historically a young lady standing under a ball of mistletoe could not refuse to be kissed and if a couple in love exchanged kisses under the mistletoe this was seen as a promise to marry.

Times change of course, but what does not change is the mistletoe itself. *Viscum album* to give it the scientific name, is actually a parasite which grows mostly on apple or poplar trees. It obtains minerals and nutrients from these trees whilst remaining high up in the branches nearest any available sunshine which enables photosynthesis. Mistletoe leaves, stems and berries can be poisonous to humans if ingested, and dogs and cats can also be at risk when mistletoe is brought indoors, but birds eat the berries in winter and sometimes use the evergreen clumps to nest in during Spring.

You can enjoy the fragrance of hyacinths indoors now if you managed to pot them up at the end of summer. Don't worry if you didn't get around to it - they are readily available in garden centres at the moment. Poinsettias are also marvellous for indoor colour at this time of year. They are native to Mexico where, in their natural habitat, they can grow up to 16 ft. The plant bears beautiful dark green leaves and coloured bracts - most often bright red but they can be orange, pink, cream or white. These bracts are often mistaken for flower petals because of the colour, but actually they are leaves. They need plenty of daylight during the day to maintain a nice bright colour but don't like draughts (a bit like me!!).