



# THE AMATEUR GARDENER

by Vanda Lawrence



If your lawn edges need repairing, this is the time to do it and don't forget to finish digging over any vacant plots in the vegetable garden to stop the weeds getting a hold. Check stakes, ties, fleeces and other garden supports - any high winds will loosen these. Lastly, oil the locks and padlocks on the garden shed - I'd hate to think you weren't able to get inside for your garden equipment in the Spring 😊



Heucheras@Wikimedia Commons/Andy Mabbett

**B**y the time you read this Christmas will be over and the New Year celebrations too! Where does the time go? I send you my very best wishes for 2015 - health and happiness to all.

We have recently come back from a visit to the UK and while we were there made the usual visits to garden centres (well, it's rude not to!). On one occasion there was a stand for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). I didn't realise when or why this society was founded - did you? Apparently, it was originally the 'Plumage League' founded in 1889 by Emily Williamson at her home in Didsbury, Manchester. She started it as a protest group campaigning against the use of Great Crested Grebe feathers being used as fashion accessories for hats and clothing; as we know, the fashion at that time was for women to wear exotic feathers in their hats. Ostrich feathers were acceptable because the birds were not killed in order to take their feathers. These days the RSPB maintains over 200 reserves in the UK. What's the old saying - from tiny acorns giant oak trees grow?

Since coming back home to France we have visited more garden centres (yes, I know, the excitement will be too much for me!) and this time I have seen something else which might interest you all. A lovely pot filled tightly with different varieties of *Heucheras*. It doesn't sound much, does it?, but it really was very effective because all the varieties were different and all with different coloured foliage. Well worth remembering. I think I might do this myself.

So now, down to jobs for January. Here's hoping we don't have too much in the way of frosty weather so we can get outside to finish pruning the apple and pear trees. It's a good time to cut back any shrubs which are getting a bit big for their boots. Also, Wisterias benefit from winter pruning now - cut back to 2 or 3 buds from the main stem.

Fruit trees are readily available in garden centres and supermarkets, so you can plant these on dry, warmer days. If we have an icy snap just store them in the dry with straw or similar to protect their roots from the frost.

Hardwood cuttings can be taken now - flowering shrubs such as Forsythia and soft fruits eg gooseberries and redcurrants - just dig a small trench, line with sand for drainage and pop them in. Remember to water during the warmer months until they have formed their roots.



Hedgehog © Wikimedia Commons/Tony Wills

Last month I asked you to remember our feathered friends but also asked you to be aware of hedgehogs which might be overwintering/hibernating in your garden. Since then I've done a bit of research, and here is what I have come up with:

**Hedgehogs** - the name derives from middle-English 'hegge' (hedge) and 'hogge' (hog, because of its pig-like snout). The collective name for a group of hedgehogs is a 'prickle'. There are 17 species of hedgehogs. They are mostly nocturnal but can also hibernate if necessary - this depends on particular species, temperature and availability of food. They eat insects, snails, frogs, toads, snakes, bird's eggs, mushrooms and berries. Hedgehogs are born blind after 35-58 days gestation. The baby hedgehog quills are beneath the skin at birth, looking like pimples until the mother has cleaned the baby then the quills are released. These quills are their defence mechanism. They are not poisonous but, with about 5-6,000 quills on an average hedgehog, when they roll themselves into a tight ball presenting nothing but sharp spines to a predator, who needs poison?

So now, with that picture in your mind, please leave a corner of the garden undisturbed so our little spikey friends can have a restful winter. Bye for now.



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