



THE AMATEUR GARDENER

by Vanda Lawrence



Spring flowering bulbs are available now, so go for it, we need as much colour as possible, both indoors and out, during the shorter days. In large garden tubs you can 'layer' different varieties of bulbs, starting with those that need to be deep and finishing with smaller types like crocus that only need shallow soil. If you choose well you can have a container in flower from late January through to early summer. Winter colour can also be added in the garden by planting ornamental cabbage, winter pansies and shrubs with berries. It all helps.



Grapes on the vine © Wikimedia Commons/BellviewMatt

Last year's September Amateur Gardener was about grapes and I am wondering how you got on with your grape vines? They will have been loving all the really hot, sunny weather we've had because they need lots of sun to ripen the fruit. However, you still need to give them a helping hand, so remove leaves close to the fruit bunches to let sun and air in. Thin the grapes out too this month – if bunches are growing too close together the air cannot circulate and they will get mildew and rot. Remove surplus and diseased grapes with small pointed scissors.

Apples and pears can be harvested from late September into October – if the stem detaches easily from the tree the fruit is ripe, but if you have to pull hard to pick it then the fruit is not ready so wait another couple of days before trying again. Any fallen fruit should be picked up from the ground as soon as possible to prevent fungal disease and deter wasps.

Blackberries are also ready from September onwards. The fruits never ripen all at the same time but you can pick a few each day and freeze them to use in pies, crumbles, jam or juice when you have enough. I love to add a few frozen berries to my muesli in the morning – by the time you pour milk over they have defrosted.

Our raspberries have been glorious this year, especially the yellow ones. We are on our second fruiting at the moment, so as the fruit is picked the canes will be cut down and next year's emerging canes can be tied in and supported.

In the vegetable garden any tomatoes or pumpkins which haven't ripened by the end of this month should be picked and stored indoors to finish off. Watch the weather forecast because if we are due to have an Indian Summer this will give us a bit more leeway and they can stay outside for longer.

As for the rest of the potager – keep harvesting, keep weeding, keep planting and keep sowing. Now is the time to get organised for vegetables to crop during the winter months. To have a supply of fresh herbs over winter dig up and pot fresh herbs such as parsley, chives and other non-hardy favourites, so that you have them on the window sill ready to use during the winter.

Plant new perennials in the flower garden now, while the soil is still warm – their new root systems will develop quicker in warm soil; and if your established perennials are outgrowing their space now is the time to lift and divide, for the same reason.



Fennel flowers © Wikimedia/Neetu Singh Rajput

If you are planting new pot-grown shrubs remember to soak the root-ball in a bucket of water first, until no air bubbles come to the surface. Dig the planting hole and fill this with water too, allowing it all to drain away. Then you can place the plant in the hole, fill with soil, firm gently and water well with a watering can. Plants need to take on as much water as possible to tide them over while they settle in their new situation.

Now I'm back to garden pests. I've just learned that fennel will repel aphids, slugs and snails so I'm going to plant some near my Hostas which have been decimated this year. I used crushed egg shells and even resorted to slug pellets (one that doesn't hurt dogs or cats) but nothing seemed to work this year.

I also learned that Crown Imperial bulbs (*Fritillaria imperialis*) will deter rabbits, moles and rodents from your garden. They are of the Lily family, grow to about 3' in height and have glossy leaves and lovely flowers which appear in late Spring. Apparently, it is their distinct odour which deters the little critters. You can plant these bulbs in Spring or Autumn.

Lastly, on the subject of lilies, please be aware that their pollen is toxic to cats and dogs so plant them where your pets are not likely to brush against them and get the yellow pollen on their fur. They will ingest it when they groom themselves. If you are worried about established lilies in your garden just snip out the yellow anthers. I know that the bees will be losing out on this one, but hopefully there are lots of other bee-friendly flowers in your garden.

Happy gardening everyone ..



Crown Imperial bulbs © Wikimedia/Magnus Manske

► Contact Vanda Lawrence
► Email: amateurgardener@thedeuxsevresmonthly.fr