

APRIL

Now the serious work begins. Check the soil has warmed – approximately 15 degrees centigrade is ideal but watch out for frosts. Check if your local council gardeners are planting – always a good guide. Establish what jobs need to be done first and what can be left for later: plants sown or planted in late spring often catch up with those sown earlier. And weed, weed, weed now when the plants are young and soft and before they flower, or you will have loads more later.

SOW hardy annuals flowers, vegetables and herbs, after hardening off, a crucial stage for greenhouse/indoor-raised plants. This is to ensure that the plants remain strong and healthy rather than suffer from the shock of outdoor cold and weather. This is done by putting plants in a cold frame for two weeks, closing the top in the evening. If there is a threat of frosts, take plants back into their protected environment until the threat is over, and start again.

PRUNE penstemon back hard and forsythia, after flowering, to strong new shoots. Take the opportunity to renovate the plant by removing one third of the old stems completely. Give Jasminum Nudiflorum a hard pruning after flowering. Prune Hydrangea Paniculata to a low framework and Hydrangea Petiolaris after flowering. Leave Hydrangea Macrophylla until end of the season.

POT ON seeds raised in March.

PINCH OUT tips of sweet peas and side shoots of tomatoes.

PLANT shallots, onions and first early potatoes, with second earlies two weeks later.

POT UP dahlia tubers in cool greenhouse or cold frame; keep frost-free. Create a herb pot to supply the kitchen until the main crop in your garden is available.

DIVIDE herbaceous plants in the borders. Pot on for friends, Cleobury Gardeners Plant Sales, or for those bare patches in the borders.

TIE IN shoots of climbing roses, clematis and honeysuckle, always being careful not to break leaders or stems.

FEED shrubs and roses with manure/slow-release granules.

JUNIORS' JOBS FOR APRIL

Now's the time to sow **pumpkins** so you can carve your own for Halloween! They are very large and so need a long time to grow, which is why it's important to sow the seeds this month. So, go to the garden centre to buy the seeds or maybe you or a friend kept the seeds from ones you bought last year.

All you'll need is somewhere warm to start them off such as a green house or sunny, light window ledge (but not full sun that will dry out the pots), and a large space to plant them out in the garden or in one large tub – one plant per tub.

- Collect together the same number of 9cm plant pots as there are seeds in the packet. Fill each pot loosely to the top with peat-free compost and tap them gently on the surface to settle the soil.
- Make a hole in the centre of each pot with your finger – about 2cm deep.
- Put a pumpkin seed into each pot, making sure the seed is upright or on its side, but not flat – this may cause it to rot.
- Cover each pot with a polythene bag 'tent' with a few holes to let the condensation out, securing it with a rubber band around the top of the pot. Alternatively, you can put the pots in a propagator and put the clear lid on or cut a 2 litre drinks bottle in half and use them as mini-propagators.
- As they grow, you can remove the 'tent' or cloche but keep them indoors until near the end of May, when you can harden them off for a few days before planting them outside. Make sure they are covered with fleece if a frost is forecast.
- Get ready to carve your lantern near the end of October – if it's not too heavy to lift!



