

JANUARY

January is all about planning for the gardening year ahead – buying seed potatoes, as well as seeds for flowers and vegetables, making sure you order early to get what you really want. Make a plan of what you intend to grow, otherwise scouring plant and seed catalogues will be like choosing in a sweet shop – you will want everything that takes your fancy, which will cost you a lot of money!

PLANT bare-rooted plants, that are not in a pot but come ready for you to plant out, such as ornamental and fruit trees, roses and hedging: they will grow away quite quickly once the weather starts to warm up. They are cheaper to buy because, being deciduous, they are dormant so easily settle in and you, rather than the nursery, are having to look after them! Plant as soon as possible, once the weather allows you to: if there's a delay, put in the garden so you can dig it up and plant it properly as soon as conditions allow. Make sure the final planting hole is no deeper than the roots but at least twice their spread; put a stake or bamboo cane in now if necessary because there are still plenty of windy days to come! Don't plant it too deeply, and press the soil gently around the plant to make sure there are no air pockets.

PRUNE hellebores by removing all the leaves to reduce the risk of black spot infection – it will also make the flowers more obvious (and beautiful) as they emerge in spring. Also prune fruit bushes such as gooseberries, currants and blackberries, mulching after clearing up the clippings.

HARVEST winter lettuces and leaves, brassicas such as kale and winter cabbage, as well as cauliflowers, sprouts, leeks, parsnips and swedes.

INSPECT any stored tubers such as canna, begonia and dahlias for rot and drying out, removing and destroying any that are suspect, otherwise they may infect the rest.

CLEAN pots, cold frames and greenhouses to remove dirt, algae and moss to let the light in: it will also reduce the possibility of plant infections.

WATER houseplants – they are living in your warm, heated property and can quickly dry out – they should be just moist. Talking of water, make sure you leave water out for wildlife and check it's not frozen!

JUNIORS' JOBS FOR JANUARY

Not a lot will grow outside at this time of year, but growing food to eat is still possible. Try growing **microgreens** – these seeds are harvested to eat when they have sprouted and have their first leaves. Microgreen seeds are tiny but leaves are still full of flavour. Try microgreen seeds of salad/spring onions, cress, beetroot Bull's Blood, broccoli, rocket, lettuce or radish.

- Use a small seed tray, small pots, empty food tubs or even jam jars, damp paper towels or seed sprouters. It makes it easier to put a piece of felt or kitchen paper in the bottom of the jam jar or food container to hold water or put compost in pots or seed trays so they can be watered easily by standing them in a very shallow dish of water.
- After sowing, place the container on a warm window ledge or in a greenhouse to germinate. The ideal temperatures for germination are 18–22°C (65–72°F) but make sure the seeds aren't in full sun or they will dry out. Keep checking water supply and mist/spray the seeds if necessary – they are very delicate so handle them carefully as they grow.



- Carry out regular taste tests, as the flavours will develop as they grow. Cut with some scissors as you need them and add them to salads and put them in your sandwiches.