

SEPTEMBER

Summer has now gone but many crops, flowers and shrubs are still productive so keep looking after them with watering, feeding to give them an extra boost and deadheading to keep them flowering.

SOW winter salads such as chervil, land cress, mizuna, mustards and salad rocket. Keep them covered, if possible, with fleece, glass or polythene sheets to protect them from the weather. If they're not covered, they will still grow but will be smaller. Also sow vegetables like spring onions and cabbage. They can be sown directly in the ground or in modules indoors to give crops early next year.

PLANT spring bedding such as wallflowers and pansies in the ground or containers but make sure to keep them watered

DIVIDE perennials such as hardy geraniums. Dig the plant up, pull it apart using two forks or cut it up with a knife – whichever method you choose, make sure each section of plant has some roots and leaves attached. Discard dead centres.

BUY spring bulbs.

- crocus bulbs are usually the first to bloom and look best in groups. Plant them in September or early October
- dwarf iris, which grow about 15cm tall and are good in pots so you can see them close up. Plant them so they are touching. Dutch iris are larger and grow about 80cm tall; you should leave about 10cm between each bulb. Plant in September or early October.
- daffodils - plant early autumn is best since they start to grow early, but you can plant them later and still get a reasonable result.
- tulips – plant these around November at the earliest to avoid problems like tulip fire.

FEED oriental hellebores with Growmore or calcified seaweed to prepare them for flowering. Then mulch them.

GARDEN MAINTENANCE

- get the lawn winter-ready before the weather turns colder. If moss is a problem, apply a moss killer or a combined moss killer/weed/ feed product. When it starts to die, rake off the moss and thatch and mow the grass, setting the blades a little lower than normal.
- mulch any bare soil by sprinkling 3-5cm of well-rotted, mushroom compost or garden compost over it and leaving the worms to take it down
- keep weeding: you can put annual weeds on your compost heap but not perennial weeds

- keep a lookout for pests and diseases, especially mildew as the weather gets damper and cooler. Decide whether your mildew is the POWDERY or DOWNY sort. Powdery is generally a summer disease, and looks like a whitish coat on the upper surfaces of leaves. Watering in dry periods can help with this. Downy shows as white areas below the leaves. This is a disease of wet periods, particularly autumn. Spores spread quickly, and prompt removal of infected material is advisable. At this time there is no fungicide treatment for downy, but powdery can often be prevented by garden fungicides.

JUNIORS' JOBS FOR SEPTEMBER

Would you like to give your friends and relatives a home-grown Christmas present? If so, this is the month **to plant bulbs that will be in flower at Christmas** for everyone to enjoy. The bulbs most often grown for Christmas flowering are hyacinths, paperwhite daffodils and the very big bulb of Hippeastrum or Amaryllis, as it is commonly called.

We'll concentrate on hyacinths and paperwhite daffodils – the method is the same for both. You need to buy bulbs that are specially prepared to grow and flower early – these bulbs are sold in garden centres and supermarkets as 'prepared bulbs', which means they have been produced to grow and flourish much earlier than the bulbs we see flowering outside in the spring.

- If you are planting hyacinths, you must wear gloves because they can cause skin irritation – and even then, avoid touching your eyes or face even though you have gloves on.
- Choose a pot that will take about five bulbs – the bulbs need to sit in the pot without touching each other or the sides of the pot. The exact number of bulbs you put in the pot varies, therefore, on its size. But you don't have to plant pots as big as this – even one bulb in a small pot will make a great gift!
- Wet the bulb fibre or compost and put it in the bottom of the pot – bulbs like to be watered but not become waterlogged, so you need to use compost that will drain well. Put the bulbs in the pot, setting them out carefully and then fill up the pot with more moist bulb fibre or compost. Leave 1cm around the rim of the pot – the tips of the bulbs should be just visible.
- Keep the pot in a cool and dark place indoors to let the roots develop. You can put them outside instead, but they mustn't be in the sun – shade is best – and cover the whole pot with about 15cm of bark or compost.
- You now need to leave them for about 10 weeks! But keep checking that the bulbs aren't drying out and to see how big the shoots are. When they are about 4-5cm long, put them into a cool room, but not in bright light, so the leaves will turn green.
- When this has happened, move them to a warmer room but not by a radiator or in a draught. If the leaves develop faster than the flower buds, move them to a darker place for a couple of days.
- In about 22 days, they should be in flower – stand back and feel proud of having grown such beautiful plants!

