



Your GARDEN through the SEASONS

From weeding to pruning, the jobs to do and shortcuts to take, plus which plants to grow in spring, summer, autumn and winter. Garden writer Pattie Barron shares her expertise on how to keep your green space beautiful all year round... ↔



SPRING

Nature is waking up, bringing with it the delicious scent of anticipation as leaves unfurl and blossom appears on the trees, while early-flowering clematis, camellias and magnolias mark the beginning of spring proper. It's a busy time in the garden, with the focus on preparing beds and borders, pruning summer-flowering shrubs and sowing annuals to put on a vibrant show come summer. ✨

Jobs to do

Early spring

- Cut back deciduous grasses such as *Miscanthus*. For evergreen grasses such as ponytail – *Stipa tenuissima* – simply run your fingers through them to remove dead thatch.
- Prune buddleias back hard to about 30cm so flowers will bloom lower down.
- Cut back stems of *Clematis viticella*, such as 'Polish Spirit' and 'Étoile Violette', to the lowest pair of buds, about 15–30cm above soil level.

Mid-spring

- Plant summer-flowering lily bulbs in deep pots, adding a handful of grit to compost to improve drainage. Try the highly perfumed, trumpet-flowered white *Lilium regale*.
- Bury dahlia tubers in pots of moist compost, with the main stem just visible, and be sure to protect them from frost.
- Sprinkle granular feed around the base of fruit bushes and roses.

Late spring

- Pull out clumps of dead forget-me-nots, then shake to release seed wherever you'd like new growth.
- Once bulbs in pots finish flowering, plant them into the ground to bloom next year.
- Complete buying and planting trees and shrubs – deciduous and evergreen. Try a pure white *Magnolia stellata* for a small garden.

GET GROWING

Sweet peas

If you like sweet peas, but don't want to grow them from seed, buy them as baby plants, choosing ones with short, stocky growth rather than long trailing stems. Read the label to check whether they're familiar sweet-pea size or compact varieties for hanging baskets. To make plants bushier, pinch them out in late spring.



From top: *Magnolia stellata*, tulips and hyacinths, and sweet peas are all perfect for pots



SHORTCUTS

- Missed out on bulb planting? Buy ready-potted bulbs already in bud – crocus, hyacinth, muscari, daffodils, tulips. Place in garden pots and group on the patio for a spring display. Bright polyanthus and dainty violas add to the fun.
- For a money-saving head start on summer bedding, pot up 'lots' or plugs of summer bedding into small pots of multipurpose compost and protect them until frost danger has passed.
- Mulching borders with a 5–10cm layer of well-rotted manure, compost or bark chippings will help soil retain moisture and improve the structure.
- Scatter hardy annuals seed over weed-free soil for a summer show: pot marigolds, nigella and opium poppies are all easy and speedy.
- At the first sign of growth, place supports in soil around perennials that tend to flop, such as peonies.

TOP TIP Want to give potato tubers a head start before planting time? Place them in open egg boxes to encourage shoots

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SUMMER

Now's the time to reap the rewards of all your hard work and enjoy your summer garden. English roses are at their best in June and July, and hanging baskets full of trailing petunia, fuchsias and geraniums will start blooming, too. There's still plenty to do but it's more about controlling the glorious chaos good weather brings, with weeding, watering, cutting back and deadheading to keep the flowers coming. ♡



Through the seasons



From top: cut back and dry lavender flowers; ornamental chillies brighten a garden; a trellis encourages roses to climb

SHORTCUTS

- No time to dig up perennial weeds such as dandelions? Snip off flower heads to stop them from multiplying.
- Add controlled-release fertiliser granules to compost in container plants: they'll last several weeks and save on weekly feeding.
- Buy ornamental veg plants to save on sowing: tomato, pepper, chilli and aubergine are ideal for containers and add colour to summer displays.



TOP TIP Once a week, feed foliage plants with diluted liquid seaweed and fruiting and flowering plants with diluted liquid tomato feed

Jobs to do

Early summer

- Stake and support plants before they need it: easier than trying to hoick them up later if they fall down!
- Prep plants for drought by spreading a compost of bark chippings around their bases, avoiding the stems. Do this when soil is moist, not dry.
- Using soft ties or twine, tie in climbers, training them along horizontal wires or trellis to encourage flowering.
- Keep on top of weeding at the start of the season and you'll save time later.

Midsummer

- Destroy scarlet lily beetles on plants before they destroy precious lily flowers.
- Save poppy and nigella seed for autumn sowing. Cut stems, put a paper bag over their heads and shake the bag so the seeds fall out.
- Make more climbers by pinning their long stems into the soil, using U-shaped pins.
- Prune mock orange *Philadelphus* after flowering, cutting one-third of the oldest stems to ground level.
- Cut flowering herbs – thyme, oregano, mint – back hard to promote new growth.

Late summer

- Clip evergreen hedges and topiary, first making sure no nesting birds remain. Large-leaved bushes such as bay should have whole leaves cut to avoid a sheared finish.
- Cut back faded flowering stems of lavender and santolina, and use for drying.
- When mowing, leave an area of long grass to encourage wildlife.
- Tidy borders by pulling out faded flowers, dead foliage and weeds to make room for new growth.
- Instantly fill a space in a border with a flowering plant in a black pot – but don't forget to water it!



WORD: PAULINE BURTON PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK



BE CONTAINER SAVVY

- Choose drought-tolerant plants for pots that will thrive through prolonged heat and need less water: pelargoniums (bedding geraniums), daisy-flowered *Osteospermum*, *Lantana camara*, lavender and succulents such as *Echeveria*.
- Don't rely on rain to water pot plants; it runs off foliage rather than into compost.
- Move pots into shade during hot spells.
- Push your finger into the compost in the plant pot – if it's dry, water it!
- Mulch pots with sharp gravel, which holds in water, deters slugs and snails, and prevents compost splashing on to plants, giving them a clean finish.
- Water plants well in window boxes. Their narrow dimensions make them susceptible to drying out faster.
- Keep a pair of scissors handy for frequent deadheading.



AUTUMN

Don't put away your garden tools quite yet, because autumn is the best time for planting – the ground is still warm and plants can take root before winter. There's satisfaction to be had, too, in tidying the borders, gathering fallen leaves and cutting down spent flowers. Leave some stems with seedheads, though, for the birds to feed on over winter. ↔

Through the seasons

Jobs to do

Tidy up

- Remove mushy foliage from borders and cut back faded flower stems.
- Dig up and move self-seeded plants such as pot marigolds and *Linaria*, settling them into border gaps and watering in well.
- Deadhead late-flowering perennials, such as Japanese anemones and dahlias.
- Mulch around shrubs and trees with a 5-10cm layer of garden compost, well-rotted manure or soil conditioner after rain.

Last orders for the lawn

- Remove thatch and moss with a garden rake.
- Give lawn a final mow with blades set high.
- Where grass is compacted, aerate by making 5cm deep holes with a garden fork.
- Boost healthy grass growth before winter with an autumn lawn feed.

Prepare for spring

- Plant alliums and narcissi in September and October; delay tulip planting till November.
- Add grit to planting holes to increase drainage so bulbs don't rot.
- Layer bulbs in pots for max flower power.

GET GROWING

A mini hedgerow

Just four berrying and fruiting shrubs make a wildlife hotel: *Rosa rugosa*, *Viburnum opulus* 'Compactum', hawthorn and crab apple supply spring blossom and autumn berries and fruit.

An evergreen jasmine

Evergreen *Trachelospermum jasminoides* is the climber with it all going on: a mass of white flowers in summer, fragrant jasmine perfume and autumn leaf tints.



Deadhead late-flowering perennials such as Japanese anemones. Below: evergreen jasmine's autumn leaf tints; apples are ripe for picking.

TOP TIP If picking tree fruit, apples should release with a small twist. Pears are best when they're still firm.

SHORTCUTS

- Give next summer's sweet peas a head start by sowing now, in long root trainers or empty loo rolls stashed together. Keep sheltered or put in an unheated greenhouse.
- Hardy geraniums are invaluable for border colour. Increase your stock for free by digging them up, pulling sections apart by hand and replanting in bare spots in the border. Water in well.
- Make leaf mould now. Rake up fallen leaves, place in bin bags, tie, pierce to let in air and leave for a year or two to rot down (a lawn mower shreds leaves faster).
- Protect bulbs in pots from squirrels by covering with chicken wire. Remove once shoots appear.
- Dig up, dry and store dahlia tubers after the first frost.

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WINTER

It's time to tidy up outdoors on milder days, gradually getting things shipshape. Clear mushy leaves from paths, lawns and gutters, clean pots in preparation for growing season, sharpen your secateurs and wipe down the border fork and spade. It'll be spring before you know it and the garden will be calling again, so enjoy the rest while you can! ✨



Through the seasons



From top: keep the hungry birds happy, get the pruning shears out, add winter warmth and colour with cyclamen

SHORTCUTS

DON'T FORGET THE WILDLIFE!

Put out high-fat food for birds and add bird boxes around the garden. A float or football in the water will prevent a pond from freezing over and create a hole for wildlife. Leave stems of seedheads and berries to provide pit-stop snacks for birds and insects. Supply birds with a fresh source of water daily.



TOP TIP You can use cut rose stems to make more rose plants – cut pencil-thick stems about a foot long and push each one, right way up, into a deep pot of compost. Firm in and water. One year on, plant them out.

Jobs to do

Clear, clean, cut back

- Cut back wayward stems of roses, buddleias and lavender to prevent wind loosening shrubs' roots.
- Prune shrub roses, cutting out any damaged or crossing stems to improve airflow. Remove all foliage on shrubs or around bases to help avoid future disease.
- Cut down the dead stems and foliage from perennials.
- Prune side shoots on wisteria back to a couple of buds to encourage more flowers.
- Prune apple and pear trees, removing crowded and crossing shoots at the centre, for more fruit next year.
- Knock off any snow that settles on branches (potentially damaging them) with a broom or bamboo cane.

Plant and propagate

- Plant up containers for the patio to bring in warming colour: cyclamens, pansies, primulas and red-berried skimmias.
- Plant snowdrops 'in the green', ie after they've flowered, while foliage is still green.
- Plant bare-root fruit trees, bushes and roses.
- Transplant self-seeded foxgloves that have sprung up in the wrong spot, replanting and watering in well.

Plot and plan

Leaf through plant catalogues or look online to get ideas about what to grow and sow next year. Consider a potful of dazzling 'Stargazer' lilies. Or how about a mini meadow of golden Californian poppies? Plan your kitchen garden, too. Try rarer finds such as chestnut-flavoured Pink Fir Apple potatoes or Japanese mustard leaves.



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PROTECT & PREVENT

- Terracotta pots aren't always frost-proof. Scrub, dry and store any that are empty, and protect containers (and the plants' roots) with a layer of bubble wrap.
- Wrap two layers of horticultural fleece around borderline hardy plants, securing with string or staples, or, alternatively, buy large fleece drawstring bags to pull over plants. For plants with foliage fans, gather leaves vertically then tie together – it's the central growing point that's vulnerable.
- Lift dahlia tubers from pots. Clean with a pastry brush. Bury in potting compost in a frost-free place. ■