

SPRING HAS OFFICIALLY SPRUNG!

It's time to get outside and plant, sow, prick out seedlings, mulch, feed, train and prune. Just don't forget to keep an eye out for the pests and diseases determined to spoil the fun.

- 1. Plant early potatoes:** Whilst most varieties of potatoes are planted in April, earlies such as "Rocket" should be put in during March. If you're planning to grow them in pots, remember to use one that is at least 25cm in diameter and half fill it with compost. Bury the potato just below the compost surface. As the shoots grow, cover with more compost until the pot is full. Cover the plants with garden fleece if frosts are forecast.



- 2. Control slugs & snails:** Now that spring has arrived, the temperature should be starting to creep upwards. But the lush new growth that this encourages is irresistible to slugs and snails, so be sure to take some controls now. The organic slug pellets based on ferric phosphate are just as effective as the ones based on methaldehyde. For a more environmentally friendly method, thin cooper strips around the base of the plants also work as the combination of copper and slug/snail slime produces a small electrical charge that deters them from crossing the copper strip.



3. Pests & Diseases: Watch out for these potential problems.....

Aphids



Buxus Blight



Damping Off



Moles



Grey Mould



Pansy Leaf Spot



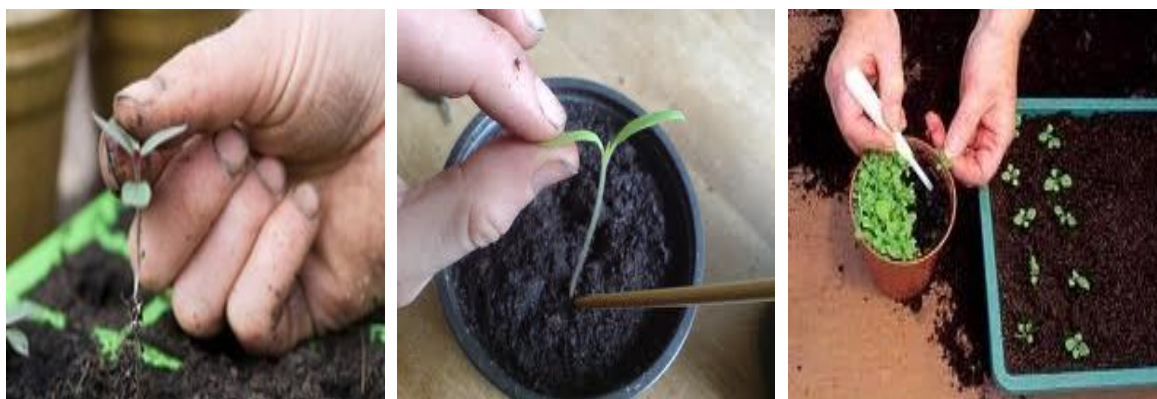
Hellebore Leaf Spot



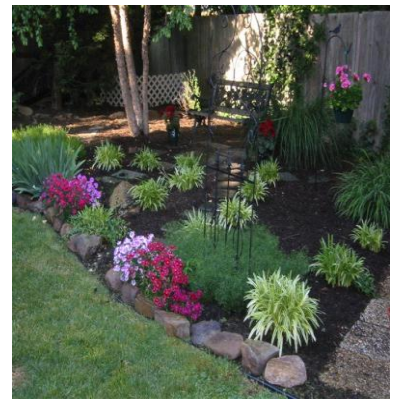
- 4. Plant summer-flowering bulbs:** Look out for summer-flowering bulbs in the garden centres. Some examples are Galtonia, Agapanthus Orientalis, Dahlia, Gladiolus, Convallaria Majalis (Lilly of the valley), Canna, Iris, Calla Lilly and Lillium. They're great for filling gaps in the borders. If you do not have a free spot at the moment, plant them in pots and temporarily place them in the border when they're just about to flower, then move them back out of sight when they're finished.



- 5. Prick out seedlings:** Keep sowing half hardy annuals in the warmth. As soon as they are large enough to handle, prick them out into module trays or pots. Gently hold the seed leaf, never the stem, and loosen them with a pencil. Then make the hole in the compost, drop them in and gently firm around them. Plug plants should be treated in the same way.



- 6. Mulch Borders:** The most effective way of improving the soil in established borders is to mulch the surface with a 3cm layer of organic matter, such as garden compost. It will also help suppress weeds and trap moisture in the soil. A good grade of organic compost will do but be careful with mushroom compost not to put it around acid-loving plants such as Rhododendron, Camelia and Azalea as it contains chalk.



- 7. Train climbing roses:** For flowers at eye level, rather than towering above your head, tie in climbing rose stems as near to horizontal as you can. This will encourage them to bloom lower down.



- 8. Plant Roses:** Bare rooted and potted roses should be in the garden centres soon. Bare rooted plants may look like sticks, but they're good value and will soon establish once planted. Add some rose food to the planting hole and spread out the roots. Make sure the point where the plant was grafted (a swollen point on the stem) is at soil level and not below, as this can increase the risk of plants dying. If you are planting where roses grew previously, dig out the soil to a depth and width of 50cm before you plant, and replace it with soil from another part of the garden.



- 9. Plants to prune:**

* Hardy Perennials: cut back to ground level



* Fuchsias that have been overwintering indoors: cut back and begin to water and feed regularly



* Dogwoods and Willows: After enjoying such beautiful displays during the bleak winter months, it seems a shame to cut back the stems now. But, if you want to enjoy the brightest colours next year, it's an important job to do now, especially if you want to stop the plants from growing too big. You can cut them back to a pair of buds anywhere from the ground level to 60 cm high; depending on the effect you would ultimately like to create.



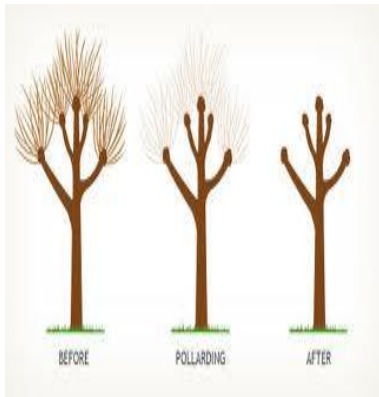
* Bush / Standard Roses: shorten back to three to four buds from the base. Cut out some of the older wood.



*Variegated Shrubs: remove any green leaves



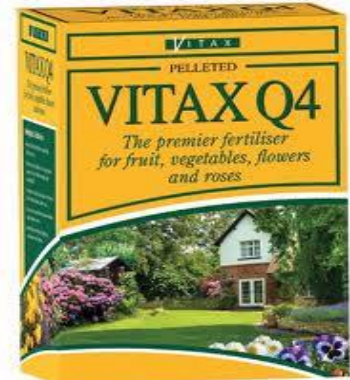
* Pollarded Trees & Shrubs: cut back to two or three buds from the crown. This also includes fruit trees.



10. Pinch out Sweet Peas: The main stem of sweet pea plants rarely comes to much, so to encourage strong-growing side-shoots that will flower well, pinch out the tip of the main stem. New shoots will grow in a couple of weeks and then the plant will be ready to go outside once the weather warms up.



11. Feed Borders: Give shrubs and perennials a boost by applying a general-purpose fertilizer, such as Growmore or Vitax Q4. Vitax is more concentrated and you would need less than Growmore.



I hope this helps with your gardening in March.

Kindest Regards

Salvatore Cala