

WINTER JOBS – JAN/FEB



This is not the best time of year in the garden but you will be surprised just how much we do during this very important part of the year. There is a lot to do in the garden, from tidying up and pruning to preparing the ground for a successful spring.

BORDERS:

All borders will require attention as the soil has become depleted of necessary nutrients for plants during the spring and summer seasons. First of all, we dig over all the soil to break up the surface to provide a tilthy soil. As much as plants need water, they also require air to assist healthy root growth. This means that when plants start growing new, delicate fibrous roots in the spring, they will have a light, tilthy soil to grab hold of rather than a hard, compact soil. We adopt a rather old fashioned approach to gardening as opposed to the new modern methods of covering borders with bark to hide a multitude of sins which eventually cause more harm to the plants. This is something that many gardeners fail to recognise and still continue to ignore because it's too much like hard work. With clay soils, we add grit and a substantial layer of organic compost in order to break up the soil. With sandy soils, we add plenty of organic matter and mulch to aid water retention and hold onto moisture. With chalky soils, we add organic compost to increase depth, aid water retention and improve nutrient content.

We encourage our clients to have their own composting area, if space permits, which we look after. It normally takes two seasons for the cuttings to be ready for spreading around the garden. With heaps that are not quite ready, we turn them over regularly, mixing the contents well to get the decomposition process going again. By doing this, we add vital oxygen which encourages rotting.

Now is a great time to move plants around the garden as they are all dormant. We also use this valuable time to split perennials and spread them around the garden to fill in bare patches.



PONDS:

Some of our gardens are graced with beautiful ponds which attract wildlife to garden throughout the year. If they freeze over, we do not smash the ice, as this can kill any fish. Instead, we use the bottom of a hot saucepan to melt a hole in the ice so that the fish and other pond life can breathe.

WILDLIFE

We also provide birds with seeds to see them through these difficult months and look forward to sharing some valued time with Red-breasted Robins while we dig over borders as they frantically look for worms.



LAWNS

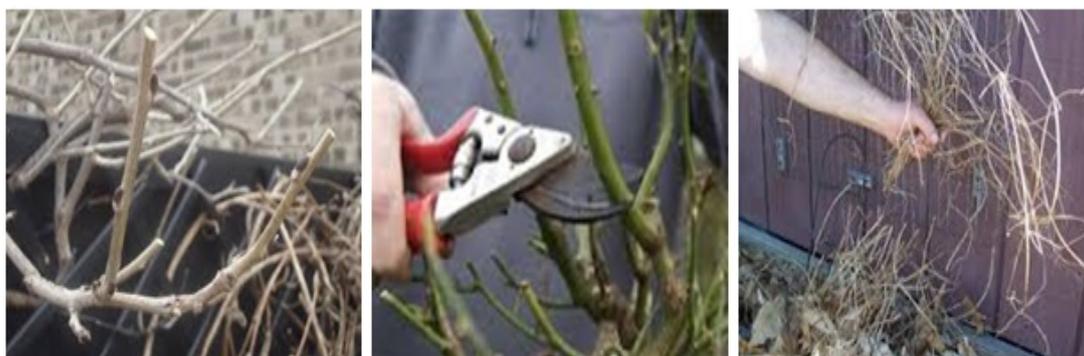
We do not normally start cutting lawns until the end of February if conditions are dry. But we use this time to redefine lawn edges with a half moon which just makes the garden look tidy. To help with drainage, we aerate the lawn with a fork or a hollow and tine aerator and brush sharp sand into the holes.



PRUNING:

We cut back rose bushes at this time of year by about half and remove all dead and diseased material and we pull off all suckers as close to their point of origin as possible. We also cut back Clematis by cutting down the woody stems of late-summer and autumn flowering clematis to the lowest pair of healthy buds. These plants tend to become bare at the base if left untouched. We also cut back reverted stems of such shrubs as eleagnus, privet and euonymus as if left, they can eventually take over the plant.

With Wisteria, we prune the shoots shortened in the summer to two or three buds from the base of the previous year's growth. We remove all old leaves from Hellebores just as the flowers are starting to come through so the blooms can be seen at their best and also helps prevent diseases such as hellebore leaf spot.



CHECKING FOR DAMAGE:

The elements can be rather severe so we check for such things as wind damage; securing climbers to supports and by staking vulnerable trees and shrubs. We also check tree ties to ensure they are secure and loosen them if they are biting into the trunk. We also check in case newly planted specimens have any sign of frost heave – heavy frost can cause the soil to lift, leaving air pockests around the roots, which makes them susceptible to drying out and further frost damage. We solve this by carefully treading down the soil around the plant once again. We ensure that our clients turn off the water supply to outside taps from inside and drain them to prevent freezing. We also drain hosepipes and keep them in a frost-free environment.

VEGETABLE GARDEN:

This is a good time to plant out onion sets and garlic.



HARDWOOD CUTTINGS:

This is a great time to take cuttings of deciduous shrubs such as Cornus. We select strong stems and plant them directly into the ground in the chosen location or place them in pots. These will root by the autumn.



SERVICING MACHINERY:

We ensure that all our machinery is serviced to ensure they are running well and safe to use. We change and sharpen blades, change engine oils and air filters and replace any parts such as cables if necessary.

Prepared by Salvatore Cala