

GET GARDENING

Since my last article, a reader has requested a subject they would like covered in this article. It is potentially a subject that is relevant to us all, as it is about how to look after **Herbaceous Perennials**, which must surely be in every garden in the land.



As a group of plants they are not especially hard to grow, as long as they have enough water and food and are weed free. Staking plants as they grow is also essential, so they maintain their shape. If you grow Herbaceous Perennials that have medium and not tall growth, then they will be more sturdy and will require less staking. If you site your perennial border in a sheltered spot within your garden, they will be more protected against the wind, and again will need less staking. Dead heading is worth while too, because those that flower early in the year, can be encouraged to flower again on the secondary regrowth that occurs if they have been deadheaded as soon as the blooms have faded away.

In **January**, when Christmas Rose's are flowering, try sowing some herbaceous perennial seeds under glass. In **February** it is worth clearing away any unwanted debris that has gathered around the crowns of the plants, to prevent rotting. **March** is the month when Pulmonarias will be in flower along with your other spring bulbs. Meanwhile, you can be finishing the splitting and replanting of some of your plants so as to increase your stock.

April should see you see you finish clearing any debris and old growth from your perennial borders before adding a general fertiliser and a thick mulch over the entire area. Also, you need to begin to stake plants as they put on strong growth. It is pointless leaving staking until plants are really tall already, as they lose their shape straight away. Staking early is far better, and allows your plants to grow in a more natural shape, and helps hide the stakes, making them unobtrusive. Outdoor sowings of herbaceous perennial seeds can also take place too during this month.

May should see you begin and maintaining a regular spraying regime against pests, whether you are organic or not. **June** will need you to split and replant Bearded Irises as they finish flowering, as well as regular deadheading of all other plants as required. This continues for the rest of the year, encouraging repeat flowering.

July is the peak flowering time and the watering month, unless you want your border to look parched and tired during August.

August will see the peak flowering time just hanging on in there, which are joined by later-flowering plants like Phlox. Keep watering if possible. **September** should be the main season for planting new herbaceous perennial borders, whilst the soil is still warm and moist. In drought conditions, hold off planting until the rains appear though. It is futile planting into warm soil that is still bone dry after the long hot summer.

In **October** cut back untidy dead growth, using the cut material to cover the crowns of your tender perennials. Begin lifting and dividing plants that are showing signs of loss of vigour and begin propagation from root cuttings. **November** sees almost a complete collapse of most deciduous perennials, which needs to be tidied away to avoid disease. Propagation by division and root cuttings can continue. In **December**, evergreen perennials like Bergenia and Hellebores begin to flower profusely. But avoid planting or propagation if there is a risk of cold weather. Delay this work until spring.

Use this maintenance guideline to produce your very own superb display from your herbaceous border.

Good gardening.

STUART MABBUTT

Write to MADNews and let others know what you think about current events

October 2006

Neighbourhood Policing is coming to Your Area

Let us know what issues most affect you by attending the public meeting

- Tell us what would really make a difference to how safe you feel
- Let us know which issues you want us to tackle first
- Get involved and help us find the right solutions
- Meet your local Officers

Thursday 9th November 2006

7pm at Marcham Primary School

This meeting has been organised by your Neighbourhood Action Group which includes representatives from local parish and district councils, Housing Associations, Thames Valley Police, Neighbourhood Watch, the youth service, schools in the area, other community groups and local residents.

A Neighbourhood Action Group is a problem solving group that will work with the community to address the issues you identify and communicate the results to our communities.

PLANT WARNING

Thornapple (*datura stramonium*) *see cover for picture*

This plant is currently growing in the old pound down Mill Rd, Marcham. It is quite uncommon in the UK but is a seriously poisonous plant containing atropine, the extreme effects of atropine poisoning are hyperthermia, coma, respiratory arrest, and seizures.

RHS Advice: Nibbling plants is mainly a hazard of childhood, so small children may be vulnerable until they can be taught not to eat any part of a growing plant. A sensible rule is: If it isn't recognized food, don't eat it. Make sure children know this. As well as the danger of poisoning through eating plants, there is also the possibility of suffering an irritant or allergic reaction through contact with a plant or its sap.

What to do when poisoning is suspected

If you think a child or adult has eaten part of a doubtful plant seek medical advice at once from a hospital Accident and Emergency Department. If you think an animal has eaten a poisonous plant seek veterinary advice at once. In all cases take along samples of the plant concerned. Don't panic, and do not attempt to make the subject vomit. In cases of irritant or allergic dermatitis severe enough to require medical attention, again provide a sample of the plant or plants suspected to be the cause.

VISIT FROM EX-VISITOR!

Iris Hodson, accompanied by her daughter, recently came to visit Marcham, just as she did in the 1930s. Iris is the grand-daughter of James Heynes who ran Rant & Tooms, the shop on the bends which is now October Cottage. She used to come down from London in a three-wheeler and remembers a large garden where they kept hens and pigs – they cured their own bacon.

This time she brought with her an album of photos which her father had taken and which were sold as post cards in the shop.

