Grow to Give

Support Horatio's Garden and your community with little acts of kindness

GARDENING JOBS FOR MAY

FROM THE HEAD GARDENERS OF HORATIO'S GARDEN

Salisbury Head Gardener, Stephen Hackett says...

- Once they've finished flowering, now is the time to prune and tidy spring-flowering shrubs such as Forsythia, Kerria and ornamental Currants (Ribes). Any shoots which have flowered should be cut back to strong, young growth lower down. If it's an established shrub, cut back about a third of the oldest and woodiest stems at the base. This will encourage new growth for next season.

- Fruit blossom is one of the great joys of springtime, but if there is a late frost (and it can be frosty well into May) it will nip the flowers and stop fruiting. Watch the overnight weather forecast, and cover fruit bushes with horticultural fleece to protect them against a cold snap.

- Tulip displays often seem to include the odd stray or rogue flower which isn't the variety you thought you'd planted. If you have any odd-bulbs-out in a border or pot, tie some coloured garden twine around the stem while they're flowering. That way, once the flowers have finished, you can easily identify the bulbs you want to remove.

- Tulips can also be deadheaded as they fade, which encourages them to put their energy into next year's flower (forming within the bulb) rather than producing seeds. Tulips usually drop their petals quite easily, so just snap off the flower head to keep things looking tidy, but remember not to remove the leaves. You might want to give bulbs a feed with liquid seaweed or tomato food, which will also give next year's flowering a boost.

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Scotland Head Gardener, Sallie Sillars says...

Here are a few tips on seedling care during dry spells.

- Water seedlings early in the morning if you can or late evening when the sun is low. In the morning, the soil will heat up nicely and any water on the leaves will evaporate before it scorches the leaves. In the evening, if temperatures are mild, seedlings will not suffer from cold shock. However, if you see wilting do not delay, water straight away and move the seedlings into the shade to recover.

- If your seedlings are in a south-facing window, strong sunlight can scorch baby leaves. Use a fine gauze cover to shade them. Seasoned gardeners use horticultural fleece, but a thin scarf or old tea towel will do. Be ready to lift it off as soon as the sun gets lower or seedlings will stop growing.

- Are your seedlings tall and lanky? This could be a sign of too much watering. If the top layer of compost is turning green with algae, then that is another indication that too much watering is the problem. Let the compost dry out on the top layer before watering again. It is a good way to train your plants to get used to dry spells, just like in nature.

- A good investment is capillary matting, an absorbent layer that you place between a seep tray and the seedling pot/tray. It allows for moisture to work its way gently into the compost as you water the mat, not the seedlings, and it will prevent many of the above problems. It also helps to keep a moist atmosphere that plants love and they will grow strong and healthy in no time!

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Oswestry Head Gardener, Imogen Jackson says...

A few tips for combatting your weeds are:

- Learn your weeds. A weed is simply a plant where you don't want it. Many plants traditionally considered to be weeds are native wild flowers and are very valuable to wildlife. Decide if you can learn to love them - it'll save time and the wildlife will love you! Dandelions provide perfect feed for bumble bees, Forget-Me-Nots are beautiful little blue flowers and Herb Robert has wonderful ferny foliage.
- An excellent book is Wild About Weeds, by Jack Wallington which will teach you the benefits of many weeds you may previously have discarded. Dandelions and nettles, for example, make a wonderful plant fertiliser when soaked in water until they rot. In fact, any weeds without seeds can be thrown into this mix to rot down. That way you're not wasting any of the nutrients you are removing from the soil.
- If your garden is very weedy, focus on one area at a time so that you're not overwhelmed. With the right mindset, weeding can be very therapeutic as it allows you to be focussed on one task, which stops you ruminating on other concerns.
- Choose what method suits you. You may decide to dedicate five minutes a day, or an entire morning, depending on the scale of your weeds and your ability. However, once you have cleared the area, do not rest on your laurels! Keep checking daily, or at least weekly, for more weeds appearing. I find the best method is simply to pull out any weeds you see as soon as you notice them, and definitely try not to ever let them set seed. At the very least, once you have decided you don't want a specific plant growing in that area, remove the flowering head before it sets seed or your job will be so much harder!
- Useful ways to ensure weeds are kept to a minimum are: growing ground cover plants, such as pulmonaria (lungwort) or symphytum (comfrey), nasturtiums, or alpine strawberries; using a mulch, such as bark mulch or gravel, or even plastic and cardboard.
- Handy tools for weeding are a dandelion grubber, great for pulling up the long roots of dandelions; a Hori Hori (a bladed-hand tool) if you have really tough roots to cut through; a Dutch hoe, if you have neat rows of vegetables or flowers with bare soil between, or if you are unable to get down to ground level; or simply a small hand fork!

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Stoke Mandeville Head Gardener, Jacqui Martin-Löf says...

- April and May are two of my favourite months in the garden and this spring is putting on an especially beautiful show. As well as doing a few jobs, remember to take time out to enjoy the benefits of being outside in nature. Enjoy looking up into the trees in blossom, watching the bees and catching the sweet scent from the flowers. Spending time in nature is proven to reduce your stress and anxiety - garden really are good for you.
- This month, why not try growing herbs from seed? Perhaps Basil, Chives, Coriander, Dill or Parsley. All of these herbs are straightforward to grow, make great garden companions (*companion planting) when planted amongst your vegetables, as well as being good for your health. They're often full of vitamins, iron and folic acids.
- A tip I always try to remind myself when sowing seeds is that there is no need to sow the entire packet of seeds, just enough for you to manage. It is also a good idea to do **successional planting with some herbs (e.g. coriander). When you come to sow your seeds, sow them sparingly, spacing them out in your seed tray. This will avoid wasting any by having to thin them out. Once large enough, transplant into individual small (9cm) pots, before eventually planting them outside, once the risk of frosts has passed.
- **Herbs to start off inside, to later be sown outside:**

Basil (Ocimum basilicum) loves to be sown with its natural culinary partner, tomatoes.
Chives (Allium schoeoprasum) like to be planted near carrots and beetroots.
Parsley (Petroselinum crispum) likes to be planted near tomatoes, chives and carrots.

- **Herbs to directly sow outside:**

Coriander (Coriandrum sativum) offers benefits when grown near beans, peas and spinach.
Dill (Anethum graveolens) is a good companion when grown near lettuce, brussels and broccoli.

**Companion planting - The close planting of different plants that enhance each other's growth or protect each other from pests.*

***Successional planting - Suited to quick maturing vegetables and herbs. Seeds sown at regular intervals in small batched to produce a continuous, fresh supply and reduce plants prone to bolting.*

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