

My Garden Calendar

with Sue McDougall



Sue McDougall is an acclaimed Garden TV presenter and qualified horticulturist. Sue has been involved in the horticultural industry all her life. She has owned her own garden centre until recently and has been a gardening copresenter on 6PR radio since 1995. She is well known as part of the 'Garden Gurus' team, the popular TV gardening show on Channel 9."



January

Plant up large bowls with succulents. They are ideal for hot dry positions where nothing else will grow.

Install a water feature to create a cooling effect in the garden.

Build a frog pond; frogs need water in the garden at this time of the year. Place dishes of varying heights around to cater for the different sized birds, don't forget the lizards, place a saucer filled with water at ground level.

Time to plant tropical fruiting trees to ensure they get established before the cold weather sets in. They thrive in the heat.

Prune Apricot, Nectarine and Peaches immediately after fruiting. This reduces the amount of water they need over summer and the new growth will be fruiting wood for next season.

Tip: Kangaroo Paws can be trimmed to ground level after flowering. This ensures strong disease free growth for next year.

February

Brighten up the alfresco area by multi planting large glazed pots full of foliage colour.

Become inspired with Bromeliads. These hardy plants are perfect potted plants surviving on very little water. They are also the easiest to grow indoor plants I know.

Plant a crop of dwarf beans. They keep producing for months. Plant a passion fruit in summer so they have a chance to get established before the cold weather sets in. Find a cool shady tree to create a garden under.

An eclectic collection of pots of different sizes always adds interest to the garden.

Tip: To protect tender young seedlings in a heat wave, take a small branch from a tree or shrub and place beside small seedlings. The foliage will protect the seedlings.

March

Plant the first of the Potato crops for the season. Don't use an area in the garden that has previously grown potatoes in the past 2 years.

Reapply wetting agents, in warmer areas of Australia March is one of the hardest times for the garden, they have been experiencing many months of hot dry weather.

It's time to plant garlic. This bulb will develop its leaf growth over autumn and winter. The cloves then develop in spring before being harvested in November. In cooler areas spring flowering bulbs can be planted, in warmer areas wait until next month.

Apply Sulphate of Potash around roses to build up their resistance to fungal diseases.

Tip: Autumn is planting time, so get digging. Plants put in the ground at this time of the year establish themselves quickly while the soil is still warm.



April

Plant everlasting seeds with the first rains to ensure spring flowering.

Feed roses with Richgro Premium Rose Fertiliser Plus to ensure gorgeous autumn flowers.

In warmer areas plant bulbs. If you are planning to leave bulbs in the ground year after year ensure Jonquils and Daffodils are planted at least 12-15cm deep. This is to keep them cool over the summer months.

Ground covers act as a living mulch. Many Grevilleas are ideal for this, they are hardy, fast growing and create a thick mat so the soil is shaded and weeds can't germinate.

With the first autumn rains comes the first crop of weeds. Spray with Beat A Weed on a fine sunny day when seedlings are small. This will save hours of work later in the year.

Large containers of Pansies or Violas will add some much needed colour to a garden in winter.

Plant early in the season to benefit from a long flowering season.

Tip: To ensure you get the best out of your seedlings, place a level teaspoon of Richgro Grocote Plus under each plant when planting. This controlled release fertiliser will release nutrients over the life of the vegetable or annual seedling, giving them a boost.

May

Deciduous trees are in full colour this month. To find out what trees and shrubs best suit your area, take a drive around your neighbourhood.

Fertilise lawns in early May with Richgro Extra Green Lawn Food. A strong healthy lawn can cope with the cold weather and keep its colour through winter rather than a stressed, struggling one.

Weeding is the most hated job on the gardening calendar. Apply a thick layer of organic mulch to smother out small weed seedlings. In those areas where automatic reticulation is allowed, after the first autumn rains turn the system off. Saving water is important at this time of the year.

Citrus trees are bearing at the moment and some varieties of Mandarins and Oranges are prone to fruit fly. Baiting for fruit fly is an effective method of reducing the population. Pick up any fallen fruit and destroy.

Tip: Time to plant English Spinach. It is a winter crop and best to get established early when the weather is still a little warmer. Grow fast and pick only the amount of leaves you need and let the rest grow on.

June

Winter is transplant time. It's the time you can transplant established trees and shrubs with the least amount of disturbance. Fruit tree planting time, the best selection is in the garden centres this month.

Time to plant onions and Leeks. Spray broad leaf weeds with Richgro Bindii and Clover weedkiller while they are small and before they set seed.

Protect those plants that get damaged easily by the cold weather. This includes tropical fruit trees, small bougainvilleas and hibiscus that haven't established themselves. A shade cloth canopy over the top doesn't look the best, but will get the plants through the worst of winter. Cyclamens love the cold weather, in fact the colder it is the better they grow. They are massed with flowers right throughout the cold months and look stunning mass planted in a bowl.

Tip: To check if your soil is reactive to clay, place a small amount of soil into a jar with water and shake. If the water goes cloudy the addition of Gypsum will be a benefit, but if it stays in one clump applying Gypsum won't do any good at all.



July

Prune roses any time from early July, depending where you live. Spray with Lime Sulphur immediately after pruning when there is no foliage on the roses. Lime Sulphur is a good 'clean up' spray for insects and fungal problems.

Apply Sulphate of Potash at pruning to thicken the cell walls of the plants and build up their resistance to diseases.

Herbs are a rewarding crop to grow because they can be harvested only a few weeks after planting. Easy herbs to grow include Parsley, Coriander, Thyme, Oregano, Chives and Marjoram. Time to divide and plant perennials. If you are new to gardening perennials are those plants that are ongoing and last for more than 2 years. It's a great way to start a garden on a budget.

Tip: Always keep a separate sprayer for knock down weed killers, (these kill every plant they come in contact with) and selective weed killers, which are those that will only kill broad leaf weeds in lawns. Even with thorough washing residue can still be left in the sprayer and once it's been applied the damage is done.

August

Time to repot any container plants, after winter the soil can be tired and plants need a boost to get them growing in spring.

As the weather warms up divide Elkhorns. Aphids are feasting on soft new growth of roses and often a squirt with a hose is all that is needed to reduce the population. If they are still persistent you may need to spray Natural Beat A Bug Insect Killer or Richgro garden Insect Killa.

Encourage Ladybirds into the garden. They will feast on hundreds of Aphids.

Split Bromeliads when pups are 1/3rd the size of the original plant. Spray Grapevines with Lime Sulphur, just as buds are swelling before the leaves appear; this prevents the spread of Leaf Blister Mite.

Tip: Planting shrubs that attract birds next to patio and verandah areas will reduce the spider and bug population in these areas. They are an instant food source for the birds.

September

As it warms up apply a wetting agent to ensure the water being applied is soaking into the soil. It's time to prune summer flowering shrubs such as Hibiscus, Bougainvilleas and Plumbago. Prune spring flowering blossom trees after they have finished flowering. It's summer vegie gardening time. Wait until the danger of frost has past before you plant tomatoes, eggplant, chillies and capsicums.

Feed the spring flowering bulbs after they have finished flowering with a complete bulb fertiliser. After flowering these plants tend to be forgotten about, but they are busy developing the embryo for next years flowering before they go dormant.

As the weather warms up give the passion fruit vine a prune. One third of the growth can be trimmed off to keep them contained a little for the following growing season.

Tip: When planting a Grafted Tomato, bury the graft and the main stem in the soil about 10cm. The plant will develop roots along the main stem, resulting in a strong plant that will bear hundreds of fruit.



October

As a general guide prune spring flowering shrubs such as Callistemon after they have finished flowering.

IF your lawn is spongy vertimow it to remove thatch. The build up of organic matter reduces the amount of water getting to the root system.

Buffalo lawns can be scalped at this time of the year to reduce sponginess and organic matter build up.

The Wisteria is growing a mile a minute. About 4-5 weeks after flowering is the ideal time to start pruning off the vigorous new growth back to 5-6 buds from the older wood. This will encourage the plant to put its energy into next year's flowering.

Thin the fruit on the stone fruit trees, this will ensure what fruit is left is large and well formed.

Make a decision on what treatment you are going to use for fruit fly as it will soon be time to spray some of the early varieties. Unfortunately if you elect not to do anything and there is fruit fly around, not one fruit on that tree will be free of larvae.

Tip: Milk is a great safe mild fungicide for powdery mildew to alternate with traditional fungicides.

November

Repeat harvest lettuce varieties require fertile rich soil so they grow fast or they will taste bitter. At this time of the year plant a new crop every 3 weeks to ensure a continual supply of fresh new leaves.

Lawn Beetle larvae is active and can cause dead patches on lawn. Check that it is the larvae causing the damage and not dry patch.

Apply a wetting agent to the whole garden again. Soils can dry out very quickly at this time of the year.

It's best to fertilise a little and often rather than all at once and then not at all. This also reduces the risk of burning plants from too much fertiliser. Start a programme of feeding fruiting plants every 4 -6 weeks throughout the growing season, which is from August to May.

Tip: Citrus have finished flowering and now are putting their energy into the tiny developing fruit. It is time to thin this fruit to ensure large quality fruit for the following year.

December

Bare soil is an invitation for weeds to grow. Mulch, mulch and more mulch, don't leave a square centimetre exposed. This will also protect fine delicate roots from extremely hot temperatures. Lift mower blades when mowing the lawn. A longer blade of grass creates a larger shadow and shades the lawns root system reducing evaporation and the temperature of the soil.

Reapply EZI-WET water saving soil wetter to the whole garden if you are finding the water beading and running off the soil surface.

Give the dog somewhere cool to lie. A pile of damp sawdust is great, just hose down every night or morning and as they dig it is cool for them to lie in. It will save your garden, believe me!

Tip: If going away on holiday's bunch all plants in pots together, they won't dry out as quickly and it makes it easier if you have a neighbour or friend watering for you.