

Garden Jottings for April

After so much rainfall in March, we must be careful when walking on the lawn or working on the borders to avoid compacting the soil. Any very wet lawned areas can be treated by spiking the lawn with a fork repeatedly all across the soggy areas then brushing horticultural sand into the subsequent holes made by wiggling the tines of the fork. When the weather is fairly dry scarify to remove thatch and moss then top dress with compost, seeding any bare patches. Broken edges can be repaired by cutting a square patch and reversing it, filling the consequent bare area with soil and seed.

Always cut lawn ledges sloping away from the lawn with a sharp half-moon cutter to alleviate broken edges. Make sure to use a rubber or wire lawn rake to lift the grass and remove debris after working on the border especially when the ground is very soft.

When tidying around the lawn edges keep an eye out for small seedlings which you can replant elsewhere in the flowerbed. Perennials can be moved, split and replanted. Sweet Williams, Foxgloves, Canterbury Bells, can be spread among the plants. Gladioli, Lilies and Alstroemeria planted in grounds between permanent planting. Hardy annual seeds can be sown in drifts including Clarkia, Godetia, Nigella to give summer brightness.

Deadhead Pansies and Polyanthus to prolong the display. Remove seed pods from Daffodils but allow leaves to die down naturally. If you overlooked treatment of Wisteria which should be pruned in late summer after blooming and again in late Winter – early Spring, take off any long straggly shoots and cut other shoots down to 3-4 buds, this will stimulate flowering. However, if the flower buds are much in evidence it is too late this season, but remember to renovate in late Summer, keeping only any trailing shoots needed to cover trellis or fences, removing all others back as before.

Any other pruning should be completed now removing any long untidy branches and broken or damaged twigs. Roses should be sprayed against black pot disease and aphid infestation.

Grasses can have the old strawy growth removed, taking care not to snip off any developing new growth try to “comb through! The old

strands to make the clump neat and tidy. Large ferns also look better after removing old and tatty foliage to reveal the new curled fronts ready to grow and develop.

Hanging baskets can be planted up, if you have room to keep them inside till late May. Add some controlled release fertilizer to the compost when planted up with maybe Petunias, Verbena, Nemesia and Lobelia which will all give a good bright display during the summer season.

Sow French and Runner beans, starting with French Beans first in trays or if you have room in small pots. French beans will be ready to fill the gap until the Runners are producing. Erect bean poles or canes over the trench you made earlier in the year. The compost should be well-rotted by now and can be covered over when you put the supports in place. Pull the soil up over potatoes as they begin to push through the soil, building up a ridge to cover the leaves as they develop.

Sow courgettes, sweetcorn, squash and aubergine seeds indoors, also grow marrows with two seeds to a pot removing the weaker one when planting out later over a well manured site later next month.

If you sow only very fine seeds, water the compost first to avoid washing away the seeds then cover with some vermiculite.

Keep hoeing small annual weeds on sunny days as they will die off quickly then.

If you notice areas that could benefit from some brightness now, make a note on your calendar to buy and plant a selection of bulbs in September including Iris, Hyacinths, Scilla and Dwarf Narcissi.

Though the worst of the frosty weather should be past, keep some fleece handy to spread over tender plants and shrubs. This fleece can be washed in the machine if it becomes very grubby!

Enjoy the unfolding beauty of our wonderful world in Spring.

Christine Brown, President, Ash Horticultural Society

PS. What good news to see the sapling planted in the Jack Foat Field. It has been grown from a shoot sprouted from a cutting from the Black Poplar cross tree so sadly cut down in the churchyard. May it grow and flourish.