

# **WINTER IN THE GARDEN**

By David Maher

***“A gardener’s work is never at an end.”***

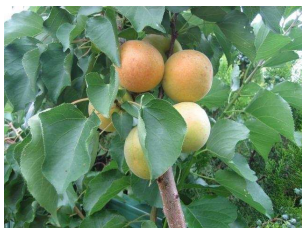
Winter is a period of dormancy for many perennial plants, deciduous shrubs, vines, trees and for some vegetables, e.g. asparagus. The word dormant comes from the Latin word dormire, which means to sleep. Generally, plants, which go to sleep in winter, have their origins in cold climates where they shut down their systems in order to survive the coldest part of the year, including freezing temperatures and snowfalls. Hence, it is an opportune time to divide and to replant and to take cuttings of shrubs such as hydrangeas, weigelas, deutzias and grapes. It is a time of great activity for gardeners because of these tasks and also because a range of spraying, pruning and maintenance tasks should be undertaken. Towards ensuring that these winter jobs are completed in the most hygienic and effective fashion, spraying equipment needs to be clean and pruning instruments and garden tools sharpened and disinfected.

## **FERTILIZING**

*The roots of plants usually start to grow about a month before leaves appear. Try to organise your fertilizer programme so that you fertilize four to six weeks before new leaf growth emerges.*

Spring-Flowering Annuals and Bulbs: Continue to apply a foliar application of Aquasol or Vital or Phostrogen or Thrive Fruit and Flower which have high potassium contents every two to three weeks. Remove spent flowers progressively.

Citrus: Depending upon where you live, citrus will need to be fertilized with an appropriate product either at the end of July/early August in the warmer districts and later in August/early September in the colder areas. Yates’ new product, Dynamic Lifter Advanced for Fruit and Citrus has worked marvellously in my garden. It is available in two sizes, 1.5 kg and 10 kg, in a re-sealable pail. Alternatively, use the tried and proven Citrus Food.



Stone Fruit Trees: Fertilize five to six weeks before flowering with a fruit fertilizer such as Manutec’s Fruit Fertilizer or Yates’ Dynamic Lifter for Fruit and Citrus trees.

Youngberry and other berry vines and bushes can be fertilized with potash.

General: In the case of most plant life at this time of the year, do not use nitrogenous fertilizers because they may encourage new growth, which could be frosted. Indeed, it is futile and harmful to apply any fertilizer to the soil in winter that needs bacterial activity for the conversion of fertilizer into water-soluble nutrients because of the soil’s low soil temperature.

## **SPRAYING**

Azaleas: The fungal condition, petal blight, can blemish and ruin many flowers. Commence spraying with Bayleton, if you still have a supply, as soon as the buds are swollen and repeat spray until the first hint of colour appears in the buds. (Bayleton is no longer available.)

Citrus: Spray citrus trees with a weak solution of Pestoil or White Oil with Confidor or Malathion added to control bronze orange bug, a summer pest. At this time of the year, the insect is present on trees in the soft tissue or nymphal stage. As they are difficult to see, spray liberally, including the trunk and all branches.

Deciduous Shrubs, Grape Vines, Roses, Apple, Fig, Persimmon and Stone Fruit Trees: Spray immediately after pruning with Lime Sulphur or Kocide to prevent leaf curl and fungal diseases. Spray the soil under and around the bushes, too. This treatment should also eliminate any scale insects hiding in the bark. In the case of roses, remove all leaves prior to spraying. I also recommend that a follow up spray with Bordeaux or Kocide or Fungus Fighter be applied to stone fruit trees before the colour shows in the flowering buds. It is too late to spray after the flowers have opened and the leaves have formed. (Kocide and Fungus Fighter are identical.)

## MAINTENANCE INCLUDING PRUNING

Abelia and Buddleia: Remove old canes from the base and reduce the whole shrub by one-quarter to one-half. Shorten overlong canes.



Agapanthus, hippeastrums and Peruvian spider daffodils or the summer daffodil can be divided, if crowding has occurred, and re-planted. Remember to keep the neck of hippeastrums exposed.

Bougainvilleas: As bougainvilleas flower on new growth, the oldest wood should be cut well back and the new wood should be shortened to 3 or 4 leaf nodes from the main canes in order to encourage flowering side shoots.

Citrus: Remove gall wasp lumps on citrus branches by the end of August and dispose of by burning, if possible.

Grapes: Grapes are produced on new wood so there is a need for heavy pruning. Prune to either the second or the third growth bud above each cane's junction with the main lateral trunk. Spray immediately with lime sulphur.

Plumbago: Prune to ground level towards the end of winter as the shrub flowers on new wood. Indeed, all summer flowering shrubs including Abelias, Hawthorns and Oleanders that flower on new wood should be pruned now. Old and dead wood should be cut out at ground level and lengthy canes shortened to achieve a more compact and manageable bush.

Roses: William Shakespeare was moved to applaud the special worth of roses by writing:

"Of all the flowers, Methinks the rose is best."

July is the ideal time to prune roses in most climatic zones. As pruning stimulates new growth and frost can burn new foliage, pruning should be delayed until late August/early September in cold climatic zones.

Prune miniatures to ground level. As a general rule, prune standards to retain 5 to 7 canes. Using hedge clippers, prune carpet roses to about 10 to 15 cms above the ground level. Roses which flower only once, e.g. banksia types and 'Albertine' and 'Bloomfield Courage', should be pruned after the completing of their flowering cycle usually in November. Plant bare-rooted roses.



Fruit Trees: Prune peach and nectarine trees.

Apples, pears and cherries are usually pruned in mid-winter on the tablelands, except in extremely cold areas, when it should be deferred until August.

Water Lilies: Overcrowded pots should be divided and replanted in aged cow manure into which a few grains of Osmocote Plus may be embedded. Alternatively, Johnson's Grunt can be used and about 30 grams of blood and bone added. Wash the roots of the plant in a bucket of water before dividing and separate with a sharp, disinfected knife. Cover the surface with gravel

or a similar material such as zeolite mulch. It is my practice to grow divided plants on in a ten-litre bucket of water for about 4 to 6 weeks. A weight is placed on top of the plant to ensure that the plants do not spring out of their pots when lowered into the bucket. If re-potting is not required, clean out the pond.

CHECK ALL DECIDUOUS SHRUBS INCLUDING MAPLES, GREVILLEAS and PRUNUSES FOR BORERS.

DO NOT CUT BACK OR PRUNE FROST DAMAGED PLANTS UNTIL FROSTS HAVE CONCLUDED FOR THE WINTER/EARLY SPRING. ANTI-TRANSPIRANT PRODUCTS SUCH AS STRESSGUARD OR ENVY CAN BE USED TO MINIMIZE FROST DAMAGE.

## VEGETABLE GARDEN

This is an ideal time to manure heavily the beds, which are to grow the summer crops, such as beans and cucurbits. Vegetables thrive in soil that is loose and that enables the roots to wander, to explore and to penetrate easily.

Asparagus, rhubarb and bulb-forming shallots can be planted. Ideally, Dynamic Lifter pellets or Mushroom Compost or homemade compost should be added to the soil. 'Mary Washington' is an excellent variety of Asparagus.

## PLANTINGS:

This is an excellent time to plant rhubarb and asparagus crowns. Remember, however, that rhubarb will only produce well in soil that contains generous amounts of organic nutrients. Asparagus should be planted with the crown level with the soil surface.

Bare-rooted berry bushes can be planted at this time of the year.



Magnolias are deciduous and can be planted in winter. (See image of Magnolia 'Susan' in my garden.)

## PLANTS OF THE MONTH

The Crepe Myrtle Lagerstroemia indica x L. fauriei 'Tonto'

'Tonto' is a magnificent crepe myrtle. It is a rounded, multi-stemmed, semi-dwarf shrub that has masses of

ref flowers that first appear in mid to late November on my site.

Sometimes it will re-flower in March after tip pruning in January. On my

site, I prune in mid-February. Do not prune in winter because it is a

spring flowerer. Its reddish-orange autumn leaves are captivating. It is highly resistant to mildew and is ideal for small gardens and for container planting. (Image attached of my two 'Tonto' on the footpath area.)



Bulbs Flowering in My Garden in July/August: Narcissus 'Nylon', a cream hooped petticoat daffodil and Cryanthus brachscyphus, the Orange Ifafa or Dobo Lily. The latter, as well as C. mackenii, a yellow, are available from Garry and Sue Reid, RMB 6270, Allans Flat, 3691.

***Happy Gardening To All***