

July Gardening Tips

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Cuttings- a great way to grow more plants

There is a lot of mystery surrounding the taking of cuttings, but really it is a fairly simple thing to do, and gives you more plants to fill your garden or give to your friends.

Many shrubs can be increased by cuttings this month, as can some climbers and shrubby rock plants such as helianthemums. First for the shrubs, take a young shoot that has grown this year (not hard woody growth), and make a cutting about 2-3" long. If the shoots are about the right length, you can take them off the stem with a little "heel" of the older wood, if not, then trim to the right length with a sharp knife just below a leaf joint.

Remove a few of the lower leaves and dip into hormone rooting powder. This encourages the cells at the base to divide and produce roots much quicker. Place the cuttings into a seed and cutting compost or a mixture of sand and peat in a shaded area of the garden. A cold frame is ideal or a polythene tent, but they must be protected from the elements and not be in a sunny spot or the plants will be dried out before they have chance to make roots. Keep the soil moist and leave them alone until rooted. If you don't have a good area of soil, then place them around the edge of a plantpot and cover with a polythene bag, and treat in a similar way. In a few weeks you will find they have rooted and you have a whole batch of new plants to grow on.

You can do a similar job on climbers such as Clematis, Honeysuckle or Ivy, by taking a leaf bud cutting. This is taken by cutting above a pair of leaves and between two leaf joints. When placed under the polythene or frame, these should root in a few weeks at this time of year.

It is surprising how successful you can be with cuttings, so give it a try and see how you can do- it is easier than you think!

Happy Holidays- but not for plants!

Holiday time is on us, and the thoughts of sea and sunshine and a break from work are greatly appealing. It can though be a difficult time for your houseplants and garden, and a few quick jobs before you go can save the plants you have been nurturing for months from permanent damage. Here is the "quick before I go on holiday " checklist so you will come back to a hap-pier garden and plants!

1: Give the lawn a last minute trim- it saves an awful job when you come back trying to cut knee high grass!

2: Hoe the borders- clearing off the weeds now ensures you don't have a major job when you return, or else you may find the weeds have taken over.

3: Ask a friend to water the garden and pick any vegetables ready for harvesting and dead head flowers if possible.

4: As an alternative to the above, you could invest in an automatic watering system that will water the garden a pre set times every day. This is particularly useful for hanging baskets and tubs which usually suffer the most at holiday time.

5: If no one can water for you, then put the tubs and baskets in the coolest shady pace in the garden and water well before leaving. You can also sit them in a tray of water that will keep them moist for a few more days. Using the gel crystals in the compost also gives a longer moisture availability.

6: For the houseplants, put them out of the sunshine and water well. For the small plants they can go in the sink on some moist capillary matting. This can be linked to a bowl with water in by a strip of matting to ensure a constant supply of water. The plants and all the matting need to be well watered when setting this up for it to work.

Just by doing these few jobs, you can save work and disappointment when you come home....have a great holiday!

Potentilla- adaptable is its middle name!

If you are looking for a shrub that will go anywhere in your garden, no matter what the soil type and will flower for up to six months with either red, orange, yellow, pink or white flowers- then stop looking- Potentilla is what you need!

The potentilla shrub is a great plant that will thrive anywhere, though if given a choice, a warm sunny spot will bring out the best of the flowers. In the shade the plants do bear fewer flowers but will still grow well. The plants can start flowering in May, and by June can be covered in masses of blooms that seem to be perpetually replaced as they fade. This continues well into Autumn when the frost stops the flowering and the leaves fall waiting for next Spring to leap into action again.

There are over 50 varieties of Potentilla, with new ones arriving frequently. Some of the red varieties such as Red Ace need a bit of light shade or else the sun bleaches the flowers. A great bright variety is Tangerine which has coppery flowers with red tinges- this makes a bush about 3 ft tall and can go in a mixed border or even in a large rock garden for a bright feature. Princess is a delicate pink variety, again growing to about 3 ft tall, which again needs a bit of light shade to keep the blooms delicate colour. Day Dawn is a much taller variety growing to some 5 ft tall, and has creamy yellow flowers with a flush of orange pink. July is a great time to select the Potentilla as you can see the varieties in full colour- and there is quite a range.

Potentillas can even be used as a floral hedge, and because of the variation in size, can be a low informal hedge or a tall one using a variety such as Vilmoriniana that will grow about 6 ft tall and will bear creamy white flowers all Summer. Put the plants about 18" apart and you will soon have a hedge that dazzles the neighbours!

So the award for Plant of the Month has to go to Potentilla- the most adaptable plant in town!

Autumn Flowering Bulbs- Now is the time!

It seems no sooner are we having our well earned Summer holidays then we are talking about Autumn!

If you like spectacular flowers, then now is the time to look for Autumn flowering bulbs- in particular the colchicum. They push their large crocus like heads through the soil from September onwards

depending on variety with not hint of foliage at all. This appears in the Spring and should be left to die back into the bulb- talk about nature on its head!

The most popular varieties of colchicum are the well known Lilac Wonder and the stunning double flowered Water Lily. If you plant a few of these in well drained soil, they will flower and multiply for years to come. Though difficult to come by these days, Crocus sativus (Saf-fron) dates back to biblical times, and its lilac flowers and bright red stigmas show off best in a sunny spot. Flowering at the same time as the sativus is the much better known Crocus Zona-tus, which has rosy lilac flowers of much smaller size than colchicum, and multiplies rapidly on sunny banks and in borders.

Grouped with the autumn flowering bulbs is a bright yellow flowered bulb related to the ama-ryllis called Sternbergia lutea. These rich gold flowers grow to 6" high, and are a real feature in October.

All bulbs like a well drained soil, and those autumn varieties planted in July may flower in weeks. Another idea is to put some in bowls to flower inside as a feature before planting out to their final garden position. Next month we will start looking at Spring flowering bulbs and the fabulous displays they can create.

Steve Myatt -Profile

Based in South West Lancashire, a graduate from Newcastle University with an Honours Degree in Plant Science, he has had 32 years experience in the Garden Centre market and is currently Managing Director of Warbreck Garden Centre - a position held for 23 years - and its sister company Warbreck International.

He has recently (2004 and 2005) acted as Chairman of the Garden Centre Association (GCA).

