



Aughton & Ormskirk U3A GARDENING GROUP NEWSLETTER March 2017

Welcome to this the ninth of the Gardening Groups newsletters which we hope you will find of interest.

Full details of the Gardening Group can be seen on the U3A website at <http://aughton-ormskirk-u3a.co.uk/groups/gardening-group/>

The Gardening Group is still not holding formal meetings as it still awaits a U3A member or members to volunteer to run the group. The Group can once again start holding monthly meetings but only if members are prepared to become involved in running the group.

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Jobs in the Garden for March

- ✦ Cut back your clematis. Any clematis that flower in late spring and early summer need a light pruning in early March. Remove all overcrowded and straggly stems, cutting them as low down on the plant as you can. Tie in any stems that worked their way free from the plant support. Early spring flowerers and winter clematis varieties are happy as they are, and don't need any attention now.
- ✦ Finish pruning fruit trees and bushes and add a sprinkling of sulphate or potash around the base of their trunks.
- ✦ Now is an ideal time to plant herbaceous perennials. Lift and divide established perennial plants now to improve their vigour and create new plants for your garden.
- ✦ Move shrubs growing in the wrong place, and cut back your overgrown shrubs and hedges. It's best to do it now before the nesting season starts.
- ✦ Prune late-flowering shrubs, such as buddleias and hardy fuchsias. Cut buddleias down to keep them compact – the more brutal you are (cut down about a metre off the ground) the better. Prune back shoots on mophead and lacecap hydrangeas to a pair of buds.

March can be a very mixed month weather-wise, from sunshine warm enough to take your coat off, to snow or heavy freezing rain. On good days, take time to get out into the garden to work and look around especially towards the end of the month.





Order your plug plants now. They're sent at just the right time for planting, and with step by step instructions.

You don't need a greenhouse to grow them on; a sunny back bedroom or windowsill will be enough. When you pot up, add some easy feed or plug boost, so your plants get the very best start. And, another little tip, give the tips a pinch a couple of times while the plants are young, this will make them nice and bushy, with more flowers!



For a welcome assurance that the brighter days of spring are on their way, look no further than snowdrops (*Galanthus*). They are surprisingly varied in height, flower size, shape and even colouring. Given a moist soil they will multiply into drifts and provide plenty of plants to share with fellow gardeners.

Cultivation notes

Any garden can accommodate snowdrops;

Plant freshly-lifted snowdrops when the foliage is just dying back in late spring

If it is not possible to plant in late spring, buying just after flowering when the leaves are still green, ('in the green') is the next best way of establishing snowdrops. These are available from nurseries by mail order in bundles, or in individual pots

Snowdrop bulbs are very prone to drying out, so if sourcing bulbs from a nursery or garden centre is the only option, buy them as soon as they are available and plant immediately

Plant snowdrops in a partly-shaded position in a moist, but well-drained soil with leaf mould or garden compost incorporated. It is important that the soil does not dry out in summer

Propagation

There are two methods that can be used to propagate snowdrops:

Division

Lift and divide clumps as the foliage turns yellow. Split the clumps into smaller pieces with as little disturbance as possible. Bulbs can also be planted singly at the same depth as they were on the soil.

Seed

Collect and sow seed as soon as they ripen. Germination should take place as the temperatures start to rise after winter.