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Despite our reluctance to venture out, the garden is stirring from its winter slumbers.

Snowdrops, always a welcome sight, will soon be everywhere and Winter Aconites and the tiny blue *Iris reticulata* or *Iris unguicularis* can also be sighted. Soon on their heels come crocus and once the early flowering species of *Narcissus* appear late in February, the promise of spring will definitely be with us.

February is a strange month weather wise, frost and snow used to be commonplace though less in recent years. The traditional saying as the nights get shorter the days get colder is often true and yet the daytime temperatures in February can occasionally equal those of a pleasant summers day. If this proves to be the case, the enthusiastic gardener or those with good intentions can get the gardening year off to a head start. Trees and shrubs, whether

container grown or bare rooted can be planted now and the herbaceous border can be cleared of old stems, foliage, debris and weeds, then mulched. The lawn can be given its first cut of the year, if ground conditions are suitable. Frost or persistent rain however give us the excuse to remain indoors. Trying to cultivate waterlogged ground will only compact the soil and is counter productive. As a general rule, if the soil sticks to your boots don't try to work it.

A closer inspection of the garden will reveal a surprising number of flowering shrubs. These include Hammemellis (Witch Hazel), Viburnum, Sarcococca (Christmas Box) Mahonia and Daphne. If your eyes don't spot these shrubs, your nose surely will, as they are perhaps some of the finest scented shrubs. Flowering so early in the year these shrubs have developed a strong scent in order to attract the relatively



few insects to aid their
pollination.

What needs doing?
If you have not already done so, ensure that tools are cleaned and sharpened and in a good state of repair, ready for the year ahead. If tools need replacing, buy the best quality you feel comfortable with.

Now is the time to order Snowdrops, Aconites and English Bluebells to plant in the green. Buy bulbs from a specialist nursery to ensure they are grown from cultivated stock and not taken from the wild. Feed Daffodils and other bulbs while they are in growth. Aconites and

Snowdrops can be lifted and divided as soon as their flowers have faded.

Hellebores are must have plants for this time of the year, enjoying a shady spot. Buy and plant now, choosing plants that seem to hold their heads up. Hellebore flower heads look good floating in a bowl of water and make an unusual centrepiece for a table.

Herbaceous and mixed borders will benefit from the application of a soil

conditioner such as manure or garden compost, but if you have to buy a proprietary soil conditioner ensure it does not contain peat as this is an unnecessary use of this limited resource. Plant out perennials in the borders to fill any gaps. If the weather is mild herbaceous plants can be divided now. Take precautions against slugs before tender new growth appears.

Lift and divide
Crocosmia to get better
flowering. Plant Lily of
the Valley before crowns
start to shoot.

Any lily bulbs to
be grown in containers



should be planted up.

Prune Clematis
that flower after June,
and hardy Fuchsias by
cutting down to just

above ground level. This will encourage new top growth that will carry this years flowers.

Tidy any fallen leaves around roses. Spraying with a fungicide will help to prevent black spot. If roses are starting to make early growth, prune them now and mulch around the plants.

If you have any shrubs that need moving, now is the right time.

Gardening Folklore
The Romans were enamoured with broccoli. Pliny the Elder, an Italian naturalist and writer, 23 to 79 AD, tells us the Romans grew and enjoyed broccoli during the first century AD. The vegetable became a standard favourite in Rome where the variety called Calabrese was developed.

Roman Emperor Tiberius, (35 AD to 76 AD), had a son named Drusius who took his love of broccoli to excess. Excluding all other foods, he gorged on broccoli for an entire month. When his urine turned bright green and his father scolded him severely for “living precariously”.

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