

## Garden Projects for Late Winter

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### Home Made Compost

Late winter is a good time to apply a soil conditioner to your borders when many plants are dormant and you can access the soil. There are very few plants which do not benefit from being mulched. At one time peat was used quite liberally but these days peat is considered unacceptable when used in this way. Home made compost is an excellent alternative as a mulch and soil conditioner. It costs virtually nothing to make and is immensely satisfying to spread on the borders. If you haven't made compost previously now is the perfect time to start. There is a lot of mystique surrounding compost when in fact making it couldn't be easier.

Compost needs some kind of container which let air in, and as long as it's big enough, virtually anything will do. I use a very old dustbin with hand drilled holes as I don't have the space to have a heap the size

I would like, but any contained area will do. Instruction books often show a compost heap made from four old pallets.

Compost pretty much makes itself, but the secret of good compost is in the quality of the ingredients. In theory anything that has been alive can go onto the heap including woollen pullovers and books. In reality I have found home composting is best limited to healthy plant material from the garden and kitchen. The larger the heap the hotter it gets and heat is needed to speed up the decomposition and to kill seeds, disease and fungal spores. Small domestic compost heaps do not usually get hot enough to do this. For this reason I do not put diseased material, perennial weeds or annual weeds with seed heads onto my heap. Cooked food and animal waste should never be added. Egg shells and peach stones take forever to rot down. Too many lawn clippings will go slimy unless shredded paper is mixed with them,

and leaves should be composted separately.

Start the heap of with a small quantity of garden soil which will provide some bacteria to start things off. Next add alternate layers of cut plant material followed by layers of uncooked fruit and vegetable material from the kitchen. Long stems will decompose quicker if snipped into short pieces. I empty my vac into the compost bin and the compost from old flower pots. If you don't have a lid on your heap cover with old carpet to keep off much of the rain and if you have a lid on your compost bin add water if it gets too dry. About every six weeks stir or turn the compost. Proprietary products which are supposed to speed things up, are not necessary. Just give the compost more time. I reckon twelve months are needed to produce good compost. Start now, and you will have you own free soil conditioner ready to use early next year.

Three must have plants for late winter  
**Hellebores**

### (herbaceous perennial)

They are virtually problem-free, hardy, evergreen plants which will bloom over several months in late winter and early spring. They prefer rich, moist soil with good drainage and part to full shade. Several species are available growing up to 60cm (2')

### Viburnum bodnense (shrub)

Long lived, upright, deciduous shrub growing up to 3m(10') has clusters of pink fragrant flowers throughout the winter months on bare stems likes moist, well-drained, deep, rich loamy soil and will grow in full sun to partial shade.

### Iris reticulata (bulb)

An early flowering iris, growing just 15cms (6") usually appearing from late winter to early spring. The blooms vary from pale blue to deep violet with central yellow splashes down the middle of each petal. It likes moderately fertile soil and will grow in sun or partial shade.

For more information visit my website [www.gardens-by-nadia.co.uk](http://www.gardens-by-nadia.co.uk)  
Enjoy your gardening.

## Christ Church Nativity



Photo by: Sharron Stanwix, Article by Rev Alan Byrom

The annual Crib Service on Christmas Eve in Christ Church attracted larger numbers than ever this year.

The crib scene was built up through the service as the children came forward at different stages in the Christmas story, which was read for us this year by Tim Barker. Firstly, a lovely phalanx of angels took the stage and sat very patiently in the straw for nearly all of the service. They were followed by Mary and Joseph, and a very contented baby Jesus (many thanks Angela for loaning us Matthew!), by a few shepherds and one

or two wise men, along with a couple of very impressive donkeys! As the scene was completed we turned down the lights and held part of the service by candle light and as always that was a very atmospheric moment.

We sang some Christmas songs and carols. The service was done through Powerpoint and words and pictures could be seen up on the screen and that seemed to work well. Many thanks to all the children who took part and to all the parents who dressed them so well, and to everyone who came!

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