

# Outdoors/gardening

## Dear Alan...

Having moved into a garden last year that is surrounded by woodland and full of pink flowered oxalis, I thought that I had got rid of this weed in my borders. I dug really deep and picked out every bit that I could see and then replanted with garden plants. Now to my horror I find that the oxalis is re-appearing! What can I do to get rid of it?

Mrs J Walker, Bristol

This is one of the most difficult 'weeds' to control! Some Oxalis species are very attractive garden plants, especially for the wilder part or woodland gardens. The best weed killer is still Round-up but several applications will be needed. Totally covering your border with black polythene for several years will eventually exhaust the Oxalis but not many are prepared to wait so long. I am sure that you have found that even the tiniest bulb left in your plot of this very pretty weed will quickly re-colonise the whole area. Perhaps it is easier to learn to like oxalis?

## Things to do this weekend

- Cut dogwoods [Cornus alba types] and willows [Salix], that are grown for brightly coloured winter stems, down to almost ground level now. This encourages young new shoots that always have the best colour.
- Protect newly emerging Clematis shoots from attack from snails, especially those growing low down. Gypsophylla, Delphinium and Hostas will benefit from a drench of the Liquid Slug Killer.
- Start spraying roses for blackspot, rust and aphids with Rosclear Ultra as soon as the leaves appear. Early spraying is essential!
- There is still time to transplant evergreen shrubs before it is too late but remember to disturb the roots as little as possible and keep as much soil attached to them as you can. Don't be afraid to trim the tops back a little as this will definitely help establishment. Be sure to water thoroughly and regularly throughout this year.
- If you haven't done it already, prune Buddleja back to about waist height and trim Lavatera [Tree Mallows] back to healthy new shoots.
- Sow tomato, pepper and cucumber seed for delicious fresh home grown vegetables from a greenhouse. Sow for growing outside in about 6 weeks' time.
- You should also sow carrots, peas, broad beans, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, lettuce, sprouts, and many other vegetables.
- Early varieties of seed potatoes can be planted out in sheltered spots now but delay planting maincrop varieties until the end of the month.
- Plant strawberry runners if you missed autumn planting.
- Cover established strawberry runners with low polytunnels or fleece covered tunnels. Lift the sides slightly on warm days to let the bees in to pollinate the flowers.
- Open greenhouse and conservatory ventilators on warm days.
- Remove the greenhouse bubble polythene and make sure that the glass is as clean as possible.
- Remove or switch off the pond and water feature frost heater, turn on the pump and start feeding the fish!



KinderGarden Plants in full bloom, an envious sight for any gardener

PICTURE: ALAN DOWN

## The magic of KinderGarden is the new, easy, route to the perfect garden

I guess we all hanker after a garden like this. This is a demonstration garden created by using KinderGarden plants, plants that are widely available now. And with a little bit of care and attention and a lot of fun, and this could be your garden too!

KinderGarden plants, and more particularly Colin King, saw the gap that presented an opportunity to supply budding amateurs with baby plants. He bridged the gap between seed packets and trays of bedding plants ready to plant out. Now his idea is widespread and any garden retailer worth his salt offers a huge array of these small plants now for gardeners to grow on.

Now you don't need to have a greenhouse or conservatory to grow these little babies on, although there is little doubt that it helps. A well lit windowsill to start them off will do. Then move them to a sheltered area outside the back door, where you can keep a close eye on them, to ensure that they don't dry out and you can easily cover them when the weather man warns of frost. Here they get acclimatised (or 'hardened off') before you fill your pots, baskets, window-boxes and borders with these summer flowering plants.

KinderGarden plants, and others, are available as rooted cuttings in tiny pots, plant plugs and occasionally as pots of seedlings. There are all the favourite ones such as Surfinia

## Cleeve Nursery Tips with ALAN DOWN



petunias, trailing fuchsias, begonias and lots more for containers. And of course tiny plug plants of busy lizzies (Impatiens), begonias and geraniums (Pelargonium) to replace all those lost to the frosts of winter!

When you get your plants home, pot them on into 9cm pots or cell trays and keep them warm and well watered until they re-establish.

Use fresh potting or multipurpose compost and begin to start feeding with a general liquid feed after a month to six weeks (check the instructions on the compost bag as timings vary).

Of course, you could wait till May and buy bedding plants ready to go straight out but growing on your own baby plants now is not only easy and great fun but will also save your pocket!

**Warm up before you garden!** There is a huge temptation, now that spring is here, to go out and blitz the garden!

Nothing wrong with that I say, but my doctor friends tell me that this often leads to a 'spike' in visits to their surgeries!

If you are already fit and make regular visits to the gym this doesn't apply to you, but let's face it most of us are not, so it is unreasonable to expect our bodies to cope with a sudden increase of activity.

Loosening up, by stretching muscles in the way that an athlete would, will pay off!

No need to do this in the garden of course, unless you like to be the talk of the neighbourhood. A bit of pre-gardening exercise in the privacy of your home before you venture out might just avoid that aching back.

Above all, pace yourself and don't try to do it all in one go! Take care when bending and lifting and, as the best ski instructor says: bend zee knees!

Of course a good pair of gloves and a kneeling pad will help protect your soft hands and knees.

And then afterwards, don't forget that chapped hands can be softened with our Cleeve Nursery gardener's hand cream and a well-earned soak in the bath with our gardener's bath soak, oh, and a glass of wine might round your gardening off nicely too!



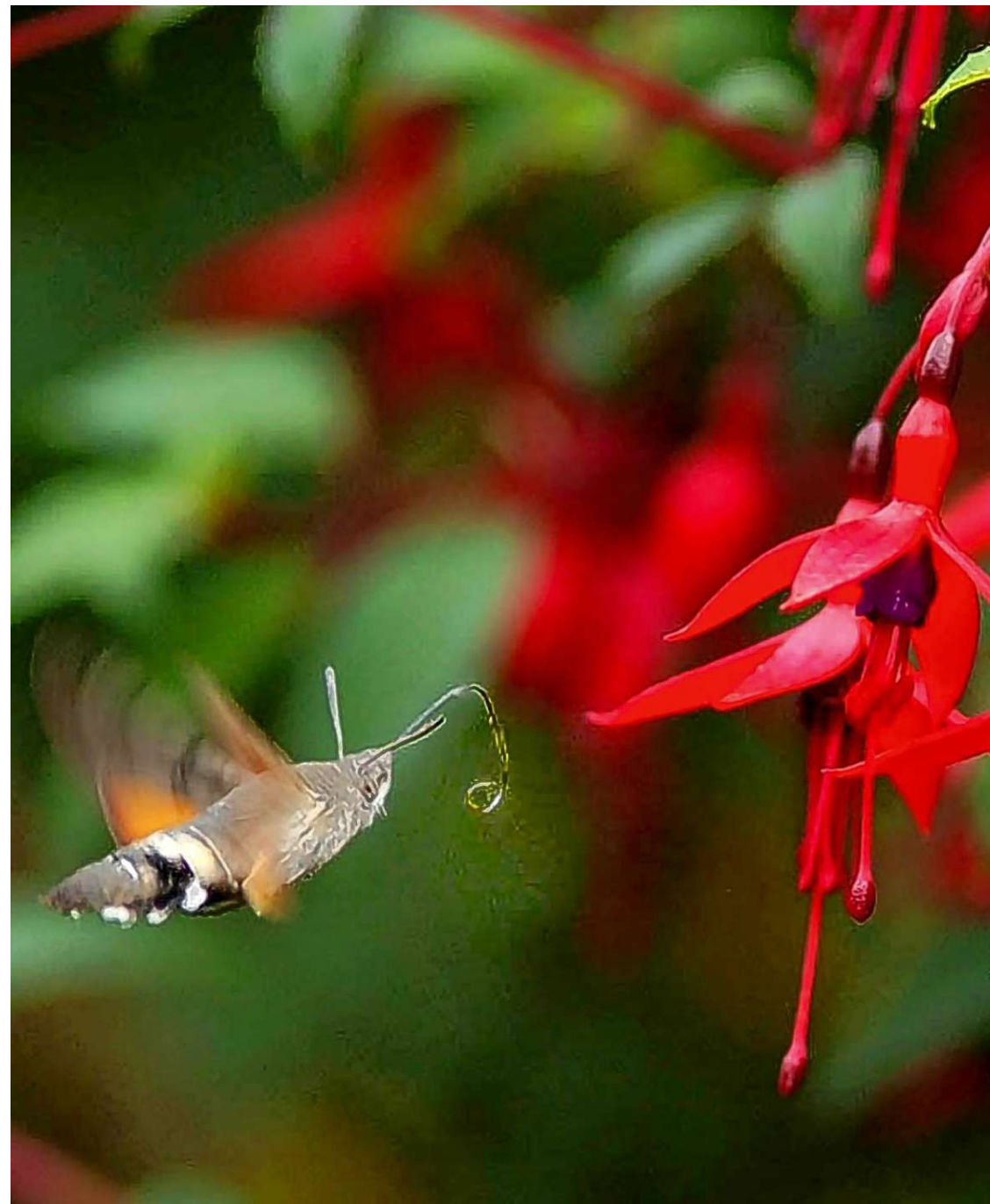
■ Many gardeners ask me what eats their Crocus blooms off. Well, when passing through St James' Park in London recently I found the answer! Grey squirrels were happily munching through thousands of Crocus planted last autumn and already 25 per cent of the blooms were severed, with the squirrels just eating the lowest part of the stalks.

I snapped this one with my phone camera and as I looked from one spot I counted 11 other squirrels doing the same.

Just how many are there in the whole park? If I had planted each of the thousand corms by hand last autumn, I would have been pretty annoyed but it occurred to me that this was also an awful waste of taxpayer's money with, it seems, no one prepared to control this alien pest!



With Cleeve Nursery's **Alan Down** Contact Alan at Cleeve Nursery, near Bristol, on 01934 832134. If you would like to ask Alan Down a gardening question, visit [www.cleevenursery.co.uk](http://www.cleevenursery.co.uk) and click on the Ask Us A Question tab. Alan can answer only emailed questions



A hummingbird hawk moth hovers near a fuchsia blossom

## There is life outside yellow thanks to the Lenten



PLANT OF THE WEEK: LENTEN ROSE

Lenten roses, otherwise known as hybrid Hellebores, are one of my favourite garden plants and it would be impossible for me to have a garden without them.

When yellow dominates the garden (think daffodils, primroses, For-

sythia etc), it is refreshing to see such variety of non-yellow colour from this remarkably easy to please perennial.

Their nodding heads often hide the detail inside every flower, with many heavily spotted, different coloured veins and even totally different colours inside the flower than out! Fully



double-flowered varieties are now more widely available but the almost black single ones still outsell virtually all the others.

All are easy to grow; preferring some shade, soil that has plenty of organic matter in them (to retain moisture in summer) and are generally very long lived!

## Plot Lines with FIONA SANDERSON



To plant, or not to plant? As the weather warms up a bit, gardeners everywhere are weighing up whether it's time to put in some potatoes.

After all, the earlier you can get them in, the earlier they will crop, which means that the wonderful day when you sit in front of a bowl of freshly dug, steamed and buttered new potatoes is on the near horizon.

But, if you put them in too soon, and the weather languishes, then they are vulnerable to damp. Even worse, if late frosts threaten, then flourishing plants are quickly turned to mush.

I am sometimes asked whether potatoes that have been frosted will recover. It's my experience that they do. There will be a delay in harvesting, clearly, as the seed potato has to produce a fresh lot of energy, either in making new growing points below the damage, or in sending out completely new shoots. Some gardeners prefer to dig up the frost damaged lot, and begin again, with new seed potatoes that are not so energy depleted. I can see that this may be a good way to ensure stronger plants.

Knowing your plot can really help you to make a decision on whether to go ahead and plant. If you know that there are frost pockets in your garden or allotment, that's to say little areas at the bottom of a slope that retain cold air, then don't put potatoes in until the risk of frost has

passed. Conversely, if you have a good sunny spot that is well protected, then it's worth the risk. Just put in a few of the earlies, to give you a good first go, and save the rest to put in a little later.

This is just what I have done this year, as one of the potential beds for potatoes in our crop rotation, is right at the top of our allotment, and sheltered by tree growth. So, this year, it's worth risking a row of 'Rocket', one of the earliest earlies, to try and get a harvest of new potatoes as soon as we can.

It also helps to know your potato types. Some early varieties are quite resistant to frost, while others will collapse. 'Duke of York', for instance, is much more susceptible to frost damage, than, say 'Epicure', which can recover pretty well.

Incidentally in clearing out some soil from one of my potato growing containers, this week, I found a few 'Pink Fir Apples' that were still sound, despite sitting through the months of ice. What a potato.

I am going to have them for lunch today, topped with butter, and chives. Our chive rows are superb this spring already, and in the absence of leeks, which we've now finished, I picked a whole bunch to make chive and potato soup. It was delicious.

Does anyone else have any recipes for using up a glut of chives? If so, please get in touch by emailing me at [Fiona.Sanderson@mac.com](mailto:Fiona.Sanderson@mac.com)

## Trip to Emerald Isle a spring highlight

The Somerset Gardens Trust has organised a series of events this spring for its members. For details and how to join, call Mary ter Braak on 01984 656633 or visit [www.somersetgardens-trust.org.uk](http://www.somersetgardens-trust.org.uk)

■ **March 29** "Plant Hunters & Pioneers". The Story of the Veitch Nurseries of Exeter & Chelsea. A talk by Caradoc Doy at Mallet Court, Curry Mallet followed by supper. By kind permission of James and Primrose Mallet-Harris. Tickets £12 which includes supper.

■ **April 29** Highnam Court and Stancombe Park, Gloucester. A coach trip picking up at Wincanton and Taunton. Tickets £30 - Ploughman's lunch included.

■ **May 5**combe House and Knightshayes Self Drive visit. Bring your own picnic or lunch at Knightshayes (own cost). Tickets £16, NT Members £9.

■ **May 22** SGT Plant Sale, Walled Gardens of Cannington. 2 p.m. to 5

p.m. Entrance Free. No booking required.

■ **June 2-6** Trip to Ireland (Cork area). James and Primrose Mallet-Harris have arranged a long weekend visit to a variety of important and interesting gardens in the Cork area. There will also be a visit to The Burren with its unique flora. An outline of the intended programme can be found in the West of Ireland Tour Invitation Letter and bookings can be made using the West of Ireland Tour booking form.

■ **June 18** Cothay Garden Plants & Food Fair. We intend to have a stall at this Fair with any plants left over from Cannington, but the main aim is to be there. Again, we will be asking for volunteers nearer the time.

■ **June 21** Evening Visit to Middle Lambrook Manor followed by Supper at the Rose & Crown. Tickets £6.

■ **June 28** Wildside and Coombe Trenchard, West Devon. A coach trip picking up at Wincanton and Taunton. Tickets £30.

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