

## What to do in... March

This month brings about new hope with the emergence of the season ahead. The starting point is what needs doing first? Well no two gardens are the same so the simplest answer is to start at one point, if you have a green house or conservatory start here as you will need space to start plants off from seed and encourage some plants inside for a quick boost. Pick one bed or container and stay with the task in hand so the process wont seem to daunting. Sheds should be emptied and cleaned and equipment checked ready for the work to begin. Look for the emergence of early weeds and deal with them quickly, hand picking or use the hoe if it's dry.

Don't think of buying summer bedding it's far too early and your money will be wasted, for instant colour add some winter bedding plants such as pansies, primroses, dianthus and spring flowering bulbs. Also look at structure and longevity and purchase shrubs and perennials, sub divide and share excess with friends and neighbors. Its good gardening to swap plants and brings many a community together, look for local clubs and societies to join, they are very cheap and the are usually once a month so there is little input to learn and enjoy so much. Further details of local clubs and societies are on the web site [www.thistlemillnursery.com](http://www.thistlemillnursery.com) and go to the members forum. Good luck and remember to take a moment to speak across the fence to your neighbors, after all they have been cooped up all winter too!

### Flowers

Prune summer-flowering *clematis*, cutting above a low pair of green buds, Cut out dead stems of *hardy fuchsias*, Prepare areas in flowerbeds ready for sowing *hardy annuals* in late March and into April, digging over, weeding and enriching the soil, Lift and divide congested border plants, Plant out *lilies* to fill gaps in borders, or grow them on in pots, Trim winter-flowering *heathers*, Prune out old stems of *elder* to promote new growth from the base, Cut back last year's *buddleia* stems to ground level, Lift and divide large clumps of *hosta*, Trim winter-flowering *jasmine* and tie in new shoots to supports, Sprinkle granular fertilizer or well rotted manure around clumps of spring *bulbs, roses and shrubs*, Finish pruning *roses* as soon as possible, Cut down all previous year's growth on late flowering *Clematis*, Cut back overgrown *honeysuckle* stems close to their base, just above new shoots, Trim back old shoots of *perennials* left for winter interest and divide any clumps such as phlox and campanula, by cutting off rooted outer sections and transplanting them elsewhere, taking care not to damage emerging new growth, Sow last remaining sweet peas into deep pots, Move evergreen shrubs and conifers to new sites, Place grow-through plant supports over tall-growing perennials, like delphiniums to enable your display the best chance in the summer.

## Allotment

Sprinkle a handful of sulphate of potash fertilizer around the base of *fruit trees* and bushes, Plant new *raspberry* canes and *blackberry* plants, Place tunnel cloches or simple sheets of polythene over beds to warm soil for early sowings, Sow crops in pots or trays in the greenhouse, ready to transplant later. Repair netting on fruit cages, Buy *herbs* to plant up in containers that you can position near the house, Plant out *shallots*, Sow the following crops outside or under cloches: *carrots*, *beetroot*, *broad beans*, *salad onions*, *cauliflower*, *cabbage*, Brussels sprouts, spinach, leeks, lettuce, rocket, coriander, mixed salad or stir fry leaves, *radish*, *turnip*, *peas*, *lettuce* and *Swiss chard*, To harvest new *potatoes* in June, grow an early-maturing variety in a large pot of compost, Fork compost into beds to prepare soil for planting, Chit *potatoes* by standing them in trays in a warm bright position until they develop small shoots, Dig out problem weeds and emerging annual weeds, Cover *rhubarb* with forcing jars to encourage long, delicious pale stems, Cover rows of *strawberries* with cloches to encourage early fruiting, Spray *fruit trees* and *bushes* with fungicide to prevent powdery mildew disease attacking them, Pick off faded and yellowing leaves from *Brussels sprouts* to stop disease spreading, Sow *peas* in lengths of guttering under cover, so you can plant out seedlings in an instant row, I saw this on BBC Gardeners world and tried it last year with great success! Later in the month plant out *onion* sets in rows, spacing them about 10-15cm apart, Carefully dig away grass or plants growing close to the stems of *fruit trees* to reduce competition, Feed *cabbages* and other *brassic*as with pelleted chicken manure or another nitrogen-rich fertilizer.

## Glasshouse and Conservatory

Empty your glasshouse or conservatory and thoroughly clean inside and out, pressure washing the frame, staging and glazing if not already done. Cut back over wintered *fuchsias*, and increase frequency of watering to encourage new growth, Sow summer *bedding* plants, Monitor temperatures with a max-min thermometer to ensure heaters are working efficiently, Plant *strawberry* runners in hanging baskets, which you can grow in the greenhouse to produce an early summer crop, Sow dwarf *French beans* in a large pot for an early crop in June, Plant *lily* bulbs in pots either to use in the border or to add elegance to a patio display, Repot established *agapanthus* into slightly larger containers using a loam-based compost, Plant *begonia* and *gloxinia* tubers in pots, Take cuttings from *dahlias* to raise new plants, Continue sowing *cucumbers*, *tomatoes*, *aubergines* and *peppers* to raise summer crops, Take cuttings from *chrysanthemums*, Pick faded or yellowing leaves from plants to prevent grey mould infections Watch out for pests, like whitefly and red spider mite, and treat at once, Put a mouse trap in your greenhouse if you find seeds and plants being eaten, Slugs should be emerging in numbers now so keep an eye out and take early preventative measures.

## General

Spread a layer of manure or compost around roses and shrubs, Prepare areas for laying new lawns in spring, digging over, weeding and enriching the soil, Be on the look out for slugs and snails, which will attack emerging shoots of *perennials*, Keep weed seedlings under control, hand weeding regularly or using a hoe if conditions are dry, Check mowers and garden machinery are in good working order and ready for the season ahead, Look out for compost bargains at garden centres so you'll have all you need for spring sowing and potting, later in the month mow lawns then trim new edges with a half-moon edging tool, Replenish gravel and stone mulches on *alpine* gardens and beds replace any lost plants and divide any larger spreading specimens, Buy summer-flowering *bulbs* to plant in spring, such as *gladioli*, *tigridia*, *galtonia*, *eucomis*, *anemone*, *lily* and *acidanthera*, Plan your seed-sowing year by organizing packets in sowing order in a shoe box or tray, apply residual path weed killers to paved and gravel areas, Lay sheets of black polythene on lawns overnight to bring leatherjackets to the surface where they can be collected, Build new compost bins to recycle garden waste or buy from [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com), it's the cheapest way! Cut down *marginal plants* around ponds, and mulch with compost or bark, Mow paths through areas of long grass and meadows to avoid walking on *bulbs* and *wildflowers*, Wash off greenfly from shoot tips with soapy water, Feed *rhododendrons*, *azaleas*, *pieris* and *camellias* with ericaceous (acidic) plant food, Several shrubs with low-growing stems can be propagated by layering, such as *honeysuckle*, *mock orange* (*Philadelphus*), *rhododendron*, *magnolia* and *forsythia*, Plant up flower beds with new *shrubs* and *hardy perennials*, Pick off developing seed heads on *daffodils* and spring *bulbs*, Dig out new ponds and water features, Clean and sharpen secateurs and garden knives. Above all get ready to enjoy the start of spring!

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