

Your Garden in March

By Sue McDougall,
Horticulturalist & Gardening Personality

Spend some time in the garden planning and preparing!

March is the month of planning and preparing. In southern areas where it's cooling down, preparing the soil for planting can commence. Preparation at this time of the year will ensure a bountiful spring garden.

The weather is still hot and dry in some locations, so take the time to look around the garden, to see what needs to be done to rejuvenate it after the stresses of summer. Enjoy this task with a refreshing cup of coffee, tea or something cooler. Take a pencil and paper out and divide the garden into sections. Write a list of gardening tasks to perform this month to keep your garden looking good.

As the weather cools and the days get shorter, it's a great time to achieve this.

Vase Delights

- Creating a garden area for picking is easy. There are many spring and summer flowering plants that are fast-growing, love a sunny position and will last in a vase for up to a week. Autumn is the perfect time to establish an area dedicated to the humble cut flower.
- As a general guide "picking" varieties of flowers require a sunny position, at least 6 hours of sun is ideal. A "picking" garden doesn't have to look pretty, do what suits the area. You can mix up the varieties, plant them in straight, neat rows or even establish between existing plants.
- The key is to zone the plants; this means keeping the plants with the same watering needs together which reduces the chance of overwatering some of the hardier varieties of plants. Don't solely rely on flowering varieties; many plants are ideal for foliage displays.



Easy Tips to Creating a Cut Flower Garden

When creating any new plantings saving water is an absolute must, as is adding quality soil improvers such as homemade compost and organic manure, and/or **Seasol Super Compost** into the soil, and a wetting agent to ensure the water penetrates the root zone.

Start by digging organic compost and manure soil to a depth of at least 30cm, then check the soil to ensure water is penetrating down into it. If it's repelling water, it could be hydrophobic, so adding a soil wetter such as **Seasol Super Soil Wetter & Conditioner** will help solve this.

When planting, add a natural pelletised plant and soil treatment such as **Seasol Plant + Soil Booster** to the soil to aid plant establishment, promote strong root development and healthy growth.

Feeding a Cut Flower Garden

Cut flower varieties need to flower prolifically, so a fertiliser specially formulated for flowering such as **Seasol plus Nutrients Roses & Flowers** will be your key to success.

Potassium is the nutrient that will intensify the perfume and colour of flowers, increase the number of flowers, strengthen stems of plants and increase the plants' resistance to pests and diseases.

As the plants grow the use of a liquid fertiliser such as **PowerFeed PRO SERIES for Roses & Flowers** is an ideal solution for "picking" gardens to ensure an abundance of flowers for a long flowering season. Not only is this great for the plants, but it's a great environmental solution as well. There's minimal leaching of nutrients into the soil because they are absorbed so quickly and there's almost no wastage.

Tip: Do not apply liquid Seasol or PowerFeed to the foliage during flowering as it can distort the beautiful colours of your flowers. Apply to the soil only.



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Looking after a Cut Flower Garden

Always finish off the garden area with a thick organic mulch such as sugar cane, Lucerne or pea-straw to a depth of about 100mm. These mulches are ideal as they allow the water to soak into the soil, reduce evaporation and keep the soil cool so the plants don't stress on those extra hot days. They also break down over time to improve soil health.

As weeds start to appear, remove them as soon as possible, as they compete for water, nutrients and space. Be careful when removing weeds not to distribute the root of your valuable plant.

Keep an eye on your flowering plants for pests and diseases, pruning back foliage will help to improve air circulation and help to combat unwanted visitors to your garden.

Tip: To extend the life of cut flowers remember to cut early in the morning when temperatures are cool. Recut the stems again when arranging the plants and remove as much foliage as possible under the water line.

Autumn Essentials - 5 jobs to do in the garden

If you only have 20 minutes at a time in the garden at this time of the year, make it count. There are a few tasks that can be completed in less than 20 minutes, which will have you reaping rewards for the rest of the year.

1. In the vegetable garden (or wherever you have some space) it is time to plant cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cabbage. Get these in nice and early and they can be harvested before the cabbage white butterfly eats them.
2. Other vegetables to plant include dwarf beans, beetroot, carrots, loose-leaf lettuce, Asian vegetables and silverbeet.
3. Dead-heading roses, pruning agapanthus flower stalks, tidying up annuals for their second flowering flush and pruning the new growth on the Wisteria.
4. Fertilise the lawn with a slow-release fertiliser to help strengthen the root system to build resistance against drought. Try [PowerFeed LawnFeed](#) or [PowerFeed Buffalo LawnFeed](#).
5. Feed all pots with [PowerFeed Controlled Release Plant Food All Purpose including Natives](#), and water it in thoroughly after applying. Top up pots with potting mix with Seasol Advanced Potting Mix if needed, and replace tired annuals with pansies, violas or lobelia.

Hibiscus

Despite having a reputation of being easy to grow in most areas of Australia, hibiscus are renowned for 'sulking' when the unexpected happens. Extreme variations in temperature from one day to the next will cause the older leaves to yellow and drop rapidly. It is all very normal in the life of hibiscus, and they will soon get over it.

Throughout the autumn months, we experience less extreme temperature differences, and the focus is on the flowers. This is the time when they shine, being covered with large showy flowers for the next few months.

Hibiscus are the perfect plant to use as a background planting for a garden. They will readily form the backbone of a garden area only requiring a little pruning (if required, to keep bushy) at the beginning of spring.

Remember hibiscus are a tropical plant, and if established in the southern states they may require a little protection throughout the cooler months.

TIP – Hibiscus petals are edible and with these hardy plants available in nearly every colour, you will be hard-pressed to not find a variety that matches the tablecloth or serviette colour at your dinner party.



Ants - Friends or Foes

Autumn is the time of the year ants are very busy excavating paving and preparing for the winter months. For homeowners and gardeners, they are a nuisance. We need to remember ants play an important role in the natural ecosystem and are continually scavenging food. If ants were removed from our natural systems weeds and flies would be a bigger problem than they are now.

It's because of this food searching trait they become a problem for gardeners. The most common varieties of ants we find in our gardens have a mutually beneficial relationship with scale insects, moving and protecting them in exchange for a food source. Scale insects secrete honeydew, which is sweet, sticky and nutritious. In this case, controlling the scale insects with [EarthCare Enviro Pest Oil insect spray](#) will reduce damage to plants by ants.

In summer and autumn ants move into potted plants and garden beds. They excavate soil around the roots and expose fine feeder roots to air, causing plants to die back. In addition, soil where ants build their nest tends to be water repellent. No amount of water will rewet the soil. The addition of a wetting agent is crucial in helping force ants to move out without the need for applying ant control products.



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